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LETTERS ✓

ON THE

DIFFICULTIES OF RELIGION. ✓

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BY CATHARINE E. BEECHER.

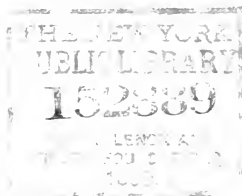
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## PREFACE.

THE following letters are portions of discussions, which have taken place during the last eight or ten years, between the author and several of her friends, some of whom are no longer in the world. The writer wishes to secure for the work, the interest that belongs to truth, and therefore, though much has been altered and much added, in preparing it for the public, the reader is assured, that such discussions, on such topics, and between such persons as are here introduced, have actually taken place; and that no character, circumstance or fact is introduced or alluded to, which has not a foundation in reality.

The writer has had opportunities of mingling, on social and familiar terms, with persons of a great variety of moral and religious sentiments. Among all denominations of Christians, who agree in the fundamental truths of Christianity, she has found persons of intelligence, learning and piety, whose friendship has been highly prized.—Among Unitarians, Universalists, Swedenborgians, and Catholics, she has found amiable, conscientious, and intelligent friends. Even among Infidels, Atheists, and entire sceptics, there have been found those, whose domestic character, fine natural endowments, and real friendship, have been appreciated and valued as they deserved.

The writer has found also among her friends, the partizans of warmly contested opinions and practices. She has mingled with the temperance advocates, and the defenders of alcoholic drinks; among abolitionists, colonizationists, and the unqualified defenders of slavery. Indeed, there are few discussions which have agitated the public mind, in which she has not heard the advocates of both sides.

The result of this has been, the anxious and oft repeated inquiry, "what is the best method of promoting *right intellectual views* of truth and duty, and that *right state of*

*heart* which will lead men to practice what they know to be right" ?

In answering this question, there seem to be two sets of rules that may be practised upon ; one set, which if followed, will produce the *most good with the least evil* ; and another, which will produce *the most evil and the least good*.

The first may be called, rules founded upon Christianity and the laws of the human mind, of which the following are selected as a specimen :

As the prejudices, feelings, and bad passions of men are the greatest obstacle to correct intellectual views of truth and duty, make it a point as much as possible, to avoid all that shocks the prejudices, wounds the feelings, or excites the passions of men. Let the discussion be confined to *principles*, avoiding all personalities, especially in a public discussion, for it is the *truth* and not the combatants in which the public has an interest.

Always give credit to an opponent for sincerity, and good motives, in all points where he professes them, until you come so near omniscience as to be able to detect exactly all the combinations of motives and feelings that may blind a man's mind. And when it is certain that a man is not honest in his professions, let the knowledge of it suffice, without broaching it to him to excite his wrath, or to the world to call for their sympathy towards him, as a denounced and injured man.

Never use satire, sneers, severe rebukes, or invidious epithets, toward any man or body of men, whose intellectual views you are aiming to correct ; lest a sense of injury, anger and personal ill will, blind the intellect and warp the judgment.

Always be fair in stating the opinions and arguments that are to be controverted, and never allow a triumphant, self-sufficient and overbearing manner, to mar the efficacy of the arguments and facts that may be opposed.

If truth demands an exposure of the evils of opinions and practices, take pains to show that all which is good and desirable, in those who advocate these opinions or practices, is understood and appreciated ; thus securing the influence which true fairness and candor obtains, and preventing the feeling of unjust disparagement. At the same time, if there are evils, or mistakes, or wrong feelings and conduct, visible in the advocates of the views you defend, candidly acknowledge them, offering also the proper palliations.



If one of two motives must be attributed to opponents, one bad and the other good, and it is uncertain which is the true motive, always suppose it to be the good rather than the bad one, remembering that "charity thinketh no evil, and hopeth all things."

Of the second set of rules for enlightening the understanding, and influencing men *to do what they know to be right*, the following may serve as a specimen:

First, get a man into a passion. To do this most effectually, exaggerate as much as possible, all the evils of the opinions or practices he advocates, and omit entirely all that is valuable or desirable in what he esteems and defends. Then exaggerate as much as possible, all the excellencies of your own side, and never allow that there is a single thing wrong or capable of improvement, in anything you or your party say, or feel, or do.

Intimate quite openly to your opponent, that the reason why he and you differ so much is, that you have more intellect, or more freedom from prejudice, or more piety than he has.

If in this process you find your opponent gets angry, assure him that he is thus excited, because his conscience tells him, that he is in the wrong and you are in the right.

If the discussion is a public one, use no delicacy in spreading before the public all the facts, mistakes, imaginary bad motives, such as fear of man, prejudice, love of ease, desire of selfish gratification, pride, envy, or malice, that you may fancy can instigate him to the course he takes; especially do this, if your opponent is a professed Christian, or a minister of the gospel; at the same time contrasting his conduct and motives with his profession, in the most exaggerated colors. Always assign the worst possible motive for all you think is wrong.

If in this course your opponent gets so excited as to lose his self-command, and rails at you and perhaps treats you with personal abuse, instantly assume the attitude of a persecuted man, be meek and patient, and bless while he curses, and receive his blows without returning them; thus securing the sympathy of the many, who always take the side of the suffering party, whether right or wrong.

Should the discussion be one which involves great interests, so that the community are thrown into a blaze, and reason and judgment are blinded by passion in both parties, if some men of candor, kindness, discretion and piety step in, and try to soothe the combatants, and refuse to take sides with either, or to defend either, till the matter

can be conducted in a more Christian manner, turn upon them and denounce them as *fence-men*, *time-servers*, *dough-faces*, *policy-men*, and any other such epithets as are calculated to make them angry, and throw them into the ranks as committed partizans.

These may serve as a specimen of two sorts of rules, which the bible, observation of the laws of mind, and *a view of the practices of the times*, have enabled the writer to form.

How far she has succeeded in taking the best and avoiding the worst, the public will have an opportunity of judging. That she has entirely escaped from just cause of blame and complaint, in meeting the opinions and prejudices of so many different classes, she can scarcely hope. But some palliations may be offered. A writer sometimes may be misinformed, and innocently make a mistake; may sometimes use expressions so as to convey a meaning not designed; may sometimes omit what is necessary to a full view of the idea which it is intended to present; and may see things incorrectly, from want of farther investigation, or of considerations which would occur to other minds.

While endeavoring to present her own views of truth and duty, and to show the evil tendencies of certain principles and opinions, the writer has most anxiously striven to avoid every thing that would needlessly irritate and offend.

Should the work ever come to a second edition, the writer will have an opportunity to explain what is misunderstood; to rectify what proves to be incorrect; and to make acknowledgments where she has needlessly given offence. But as she has neither the taste nor the talents for a polemical writer, the *defence of her opinions*, should they need defence will be left to the many able advocates, who embrace the same sentiments, and who are better qualified to defend them.

# CONTENTS.

Page.

## LETTER I.

Mode of estimating the character of certain persons who hold Atheistical sentiments. The moral tendencies of a religious faith to be ascertained not by regarding single individuals but large communities. New England a fair illustration of the moral tendencies of the religion of the Bible. Fanny Wright, - - - -	14
---	----

## LETTER II.

The two main principles of Atheism discussed. Atheism contrary to common sense, - - -	25
---	----

## LETTER III.

Modes in which men are led to Atheism. Common sense saves Atheists from practising on their principles. Folly of practical Atheism illustrated by Robert Owen's establishment at New Harmony, - - - -	41
---	----

## LETTER IV.

Reason and common sense should guide us in religion. Meaning of the terms reason and common sense. Six maxims of common sense stated and illustrated, -	50
---	----

## LETTER V.

Common-sense method of treating the Bible. Sceptical method of dealing with the Bible. Infidels are too ignorant to pronounce against the claims of the Bible. The fair and proper course which infidels should take in regard to the Bible, - - - -	65
--	----

**LETTER VI.**

**The divine authority of the Bible a practical and not a speculative question. The question of the truth of Christianity involves many questions of duty and expediency. Consistent Christians do not take a course which would be wisest and best for themselves were there no future state. Not such a variety of opinions about what the Bible teaches on the most important of all questions as many suppose. What is meant by the expression "contrary to reason." No doctrine of Christianity contrary to reason. Reason alone, leads to more painful apprehensions than Christianity,** - 77

**LETTER VII.**

**On the existence of natural and moral evil. The Infidel involved in the same difficulties as the Christian,** 94

**LETTER VIII.**

**The denial that we can *know* what the Bible teaches the same as infidelity. An attempt to show that we can know what the Bible teaches, as to the method of securing future happiness as much as we can know any thing. Mankind divided into two general classes on the question of the mode of gaining future happiness.—What are the ingredients that constitute moral character as regarded by mankind,** - - - - 107

**LETTER IX.**

**Distinction between rules of duty and the terms of future happiness. Investigation to discover what is and what is not demanded in the Bible as a condition of eternal safety,** - - - - - 123

**LETTER X.**

**Exposition of the language employed in the Bible to express the character required as the condition of eternal life. Answers to certain difficulties proposed on this subject. Men often misunderstand the nature of the professions made by men of piety,** - - - - 132

**LETTER XI.**

**Difficulties involved in supposing all mankind in a future**

state to be divided into only two classes, one class eternally happy, and the other, eternally miserable. Considerations offered to meet these difficulties,	-	146
--	---	-----

## LETTER XII.

Difficulties occasioned by the inconsistent lives and characters of the professors of religion. Considerations offered to meet these objections,	- - -	157
--	-------	-----

## LETTER XIII.

Objection that man has not the control of his emotions of affection answered. The difficulty of loving an invisible Being discussed,	- - - -	169
--	---------	-----

## LETTER XIV.

On the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit,	-	178
--	---	-----

## LETTER XV.

Causes of certain unpleasant associations in regard to the character of God. The Old Testament as perfect as the New. The mind of man so constituted as to be pleased with all the traits of character that are revealed as belonging to God. The manifestations of these traits of the divine character, in his works and in his word,		185
---	--	-----

## LETTER XVI.

The law of God, demanding our highest affection is a requisition which includes the highest happiness of man. This shown to be supported by reason, by experience, and by the declarations of the Bible. Henry Martyn and Lord Byron.	- - - - -	211
---	-----------	-----

## LETTER XVII.

Unitarian strength and success traced to two causes. First, unfairness in argument; Second, a violation of the laws of evidence in regard to the interpretation of language. Illustrations.	- - - - -	230
---	-----------	-----

## LETTER XVIII.

Distinction between injurious opinions and the persons who advocate them. Reasons why it is not right to call Unitarians Infidels. Unitarianism, a system of infidelity. Different uses of the term Christian. The sense in		
---	--	--

which it is proper to deny that Unitarians are Chris- tians.	- - - - -	Page. 263
---	-----------	--------------

## LETTER XIX.

Difficulty of discovering exactly what Unitarians believe. What are the peculiarities of the gospel revelation in distinction from natural religion and from Judaism.— Unitarianism presents no doctrines not known before the gospel was made known. The peculiar doctrines that constitute Christianity in distinction from Deism, Judaism and Unitarianism. Term Evangelical Chris- tians defined.	- - - - -	274
--	-----------	-----

## LETTER XX.

Moral tendencies of Unitarianism,	- -	292
-----------------------------------	-----	-----

## LETTER XXI.

Use of the term "charity" discussed. Creeds. A perse- cuting spirit,	- - - - -	308
---	-----------	-----

## LETTER XXII.

On Revivals of Religion,	- - -	323
--------------------------	-------	-----

## LETTER XXIII.

On the discussions now agitating the Presbyterian church,		330
---	--	-----

## ERRATUM.

Page 210, line 8 from the bottom, for *unreclining* read *unrealizing*.

## LETTER I.

DEAR SIR:

The acquaintance I formed with you during my late journey, awakened a desire for some farther communication on the topic of our late conversation. What I learned from a mutual friend of your character and past history, has increased this desire, and the interest you seemed to feel to remove misconceptions in regard to your opinions and the moral character of those who embrace them, leads me to believe that the proposal of prolonged discussion, will not be unacceptable.

In estimating the moral character of persons who believe in no God, in no future retributions, in no obligations of marriage, no rights of parents, of laws, or of property, I must necessarily adopt altogether a new standard of judging, on duties connected with these subjects. My idea of virtue, or moral excellence, includes a feeling of obligation to perform certain moral duties, temptations to violate such obligation, and a strength of principle

that enables a person to overcome such temptations.

But if a man thinks there is no obligation to conform to certain laws, which I deem laws of virtue, and yet lives without breaking them, I feel no respect for him on this account. My only inference is, either that he has no temptations to resist, or that he is restrained simply by an unwillingness to encounter the contempt, or dislike, that will result from violating what he deems the prejudices of other minds. If a man considers certain restraints unwise and injurious, which I consider the laws of virtue, and which deter other men from certain vices, what to me can be the merit of his freedom from these vices? It is not the result of that conscientious self government, which is indispensable to virtue, but is either merely freedom from temptation, or fear of censure.

As to the honorable and benevolent feelings that in some cases may co-exist with such principles as yours, I have only to say, that some men have so happy a temperament, that no theoretical opinions can efface the noble impress of their Maker's hand, in the fine constitution of mind with which they are endowed, and such men are never to be held up as examples of the practical tendencies of any system. In testing the tendencies of opinions, it is not single individuals, but large communities, embracing all varieties of character, placed in all circumstances of trial, and followed through a period of years, that are proper subjects of investigation. New England is a fair field for investigating the



tendencies of a religious faith ; the fairest that was ever presented, for it is the only large community, settled for the express purpose of establishing families, schools, colleges, civil institutions and every social association, on the principles of the Bible, and by men who placed religion as first in interest and importance, and every thing else as secondary. For two hundred years the tendencies of these principles have been testing, while children, generation after generation, have been educated in them. Come then to New England, and examine the tendencies of a system exactly the reverse of yours. We agree that the desire of happiness is the great main spring of effort, and the attainment of it the ultimate aim of every mind. We agree that happiness consists in *the appropriate and temperate gratification of our desires*. Now make out an inventory of all the desires with which the human mind is teeming, and then find me a place on earth, where *so large a proportion* of the inhabitants secure so many of the temperate gratifications of these desires. Is it food and raiment ? is it the comforts and conveniencies of life ? is it healthful labor ? is it the pleasure of successful enterprize ? is it competence and freedom from the anxieties and sufferings of poverty ? is it the gratification of taste ? is it the improvement of the mind ? is it intellectual competition ? is it social endearments ? is it the pleasure of conscious virtue in governing the passions ? is it the regulation of the appetites, making them subordinate to reason and benevolence ? is it the noble excite-

ment of public spirit? is it the heavenly efforts of benevolence? is it grateful love and veneration to the Author of all good? is it the hope of future blessedness through everlasting years? Point me to a spot on earth, where you will find *more* of all these ingredients of human happiness, so universally diffused among all classes, than is to be found in New England.

Some, indeed, are found, who point to the dancing, the theatres, the carnivals, the public shows, and the lively manners of other nations, and contrasting them with the regular habits, the sober demenor, and the devotional pursuits of the descendants of the Puritans, deem them indications of superior happiness. But there are certain regular, steady enjoyments, that, like the shining of the sun, cause a quiet, all-pervading comfort, and there are excitements, that, like the meteor flash, come for a moment only, and leave behind a deeper gloom. It is the calm, rational, every day pleasures of life, in which a man's chief happiness consists, and not in the occasional extra excitement of amusements. Contrast the regular habits, the domestic comforts, the intellectual resources, the moral and religious enjoyments of the common people of New England, with the sordid poverty, the intellectual degradation, the moral debasement, the want of domestic comfort, the depression of spirits, consequent on vice and excess, the ennui of idleness, and the entire destitution of all resources for the higher gratifications of our nature, that are witnessed among the lower classes, in countries

where public amusements most abound, and no man can for a moment hesitate as to where the balance of enjoyment is to be found.

There are others, who point to the negro, who basks in the sun by day, and dances to the banjo at night, or to the volatile Frenchman, who plays his violin and shrugs his shoulders at every care, and contrast these outward signs of sensitive enjoyment or mere indifference, with the serious aspect and manners usually attending well regulated habits, conscious virtue and true piety. But any who have ever felt "the sober certainty of waking bliss," well know, that the nearer they approach it, the farther they depart from those outward demonstrations that indicate mirth, or mere animal enjoyment.

I doubt not that the serious and placid countenance of many a benevolent and pious man, has been irradiated with a happiness, one hour of which, is worth a whole life of mere sensitive enjoyment, or animal excitement.

In regard to a remark of yours, as to the influence of religion in promoting what you deem certain objectionable features in New England character, I believe you have exaggerated views of these evils, which a residence there, and extensive acquaintance with the *common people*, would rectify. I can discern faults in New England character; I perceive excellencies and advantages in which we are excelled by other sections of our country, and by other nations, and far from me be that mean, contracted, selfish spirit, that cannot rejoice in the

superior advantages of others, because, perchance they may cast my own little circle into the shade. As to that query which you have urged, as others have done, "why have Yankees become proverbial for being cunning, dishonest, cold-hearted and selfish?" I answer; because a people distinguished for shrewdness and intelligence, when they *have* rogues, have the keenest and most accomplished; such have sense enough to stray off from equal intelligence and superior virtue, to where they can find freer scope; and where most unfairly, they pass as the representatives of those they leave behind. Because a people brought up to self government and regular habits, are most likely to have the calm and reserved manners, that give the impression of coldness and indifference. Because a people educated to act from principle, and not from impulse, seldom make displays of feeling; and lastly, because those who gain and keep every thing by strict economy, acquire habits that forbid display, and impulsive, reckless expense.

And now will you answer *my* opposing query? How do you account for it, that a people brought up on a hard soil, and gaining subsistence by labor and strict economy, who count and value every sixpence, and are thus most liable to become penurious and selfish, how is it that these are the people so distinguished for their forwardness in every enterprize that demands money, time, self-denial and benevolence? Is New England the place where the sick or the stranger complain of want of sympathy and care, or where the orphan and the wid-

ow go unpitied and unprotected? Is it there, that "the blind are turned out of the way," and the dumb are not taught to speak? Is it there, that matters demanding public spirit and the sacrifice of private, to public good, are neglected? Is it there, that enterprizes of taste and refinement are unpatronized? Is it there, that those who plead the cause of the destitute, the ignorant, and the perishing, turn from the villages as places where sympathy and charity cannot be found? No, the sons of New England are *not believed* to be cold hearted and selfish. They are always sought among the first in all efforts that demand sympathy, self-denial and benevolence.

Had you urged, that New England inherits the steady, generous, regular tide of English blood, rather than the mercurial, volatile temperament of French, or the fervid glow of Irish descent; had you said that undisguised feeling and impulsive generosity are more *interesting* than calm benevolence, regulated by principle; had you said that in cultivating the stricter principles of rectitude and benevolence, the winning exteriors of tones, manners, and address, have been too much neglected; had you said that strict notions of duty and justice, in some cases, impart more of law, than of gospel, in spirit and manners, had you said that habits of economy and close calculation, generated on a hard soil, sometimes impart a cold aspect, even to the plans and feelings of benevolence; all this you might have said, and I had held my peace.

But when you come to the question of honesty and integrity, I claim that there is not a spot on earth, where you can find a larger proportion of strictly honest and honorable men ; of men whose word is as good as a bond, and to whom you might safely trust all your fortune, without mortgage, or even receipt. And when you come to the question of self-denying, sympathizing benevolence, I do not believe there is another place under heaven, where you will find more of that unobtrusive, unpretending benevolence, that will watch over the sick, protect the helpless, defend the injured, sympathize with the sorrowful, and give time, and efforts, and money, to relieve the needy, than is to be found in *all classes* of society in New England. For I do not judge by the best specimens which I may have met in the higher walks of life. It has been my lot to mingle familiarly with the common people, in more than one or two of the villages of New England ; and what I say, refers to low as well as to the high. I claim that honesty, kindness, and liberality are the distinguishing traits of the New England character ; and that tin pedlars and roving knaves, are not to be taken as the representatives of her generous yeomanry, or her more cultivated sons.

I present New England, then, as a fair example of the tendencies of the religion of the Bible, and I challenge you for another so fair an example, to prove equal good tendencies for any other system of faith. I select New England, because it is the only large community on earth, that was founded

for the express purpose of preserving and perpetuating the religion of the Bible ; and I claim that it does prove, that the religion of the Bible is more favorable to human happiness than any other system. I say that the founders of New England, by organizing their government, schools, colleges, and domestic relations, on the principles of the Bible, have done as much as ever was done on earth, for the prosperity and happiness of any people. No man can pass through the flourishing, neat, and beautiful villages of New England, or enter into their comfortable dwellings, without saying that they are the people who know how to make life happy, and secure the largest amount of earthly enjoyment. No man who knows all the rich tide of benevolence that has flowed, and is still flowing from New England, will deny that they too know how to minister to the comfort and necessities of others, as well as to their own. And those who believe that there is a future state of being, and that our eternal welfare depends upon maintaining piety towards God, as well as benevolence toward men, must allow, that New England has done as much by her charity, and missionary sons, to preserve and propagate this spirit, as was ever done by an equal number of inhabitants in any country.

You may make what allowance you please, for the filial glow that warms my heart, when I am called to repel injustice from my native land. The *facts* you cannot dispute, and these alone, I urge upon your consideration.

And now, as to the moral tendencies of your

system. I suppose it so involves disorganization in its very nature, that no parallel experiment can ever be made, for no community, founded on Atheist principles, can hold together long enough for such an experiment. All you can do is to select a few individuals, whose fine natural endowments have not been ruined by such blasting influences. As to Fanny Wright, you said you believed her to be honest in her opinions, amiable in her disposition, philanthropic in her efforts, and endowed with rare intellect. Allowing that you are as near right as partisans usually are, in estimating leaders, still I must compliment you by saying, that I believe you have secret *feelings* that would present a very different picture of this strange excrescence of female character.

Every man of sense and refinement, admires a woman *as a woman*; and when she steps out of this character, a thousand things that in their appropriate sphere would be admired, become disgusting and offensive.

The appropriate character of a woman demands delicacy of appearance and manners, refinement of sentiment, gentleness of speech, modesty in feeling and action, a shrinking from notoriety and public gaze, a love of dependence, and protection, aversion to all that is coarse and rude, and an instinctive abhorrence of all that tends to indelicacy and impurity, either in principles or actions. These are what are admired and sought for in a woman, and your sex demand and appreciate these qualities, as much as my own. With this standard



of feeling and of taste, who can look without disgust and abhorrence upon such an one as Fanny Wright, with her great masculine person, her loud voice, her untasteful attire, going about unprotected, and feeling no need of protection, mingling with men in stormy debate, and standing up with bare-faced impudence, to lecture to a public assembly. And what are the topics of her discourse, that in some cases may be a palliation for such indecorum? Nothing better than broad attacks on all those principles that protect the purity, the dignity, and the safety of her sex. There she stands, with brazen front and brawny arms, attacking the safeguards of all that is venerable and sacred in religion, all that is safe and wise in law, all that is pure and lovely in domestic virtue. Her talents only make her the more conspicuous and offensive, her amiable disposition and sincerity, only make her folly and want of common sense the more pitiable, her freedom from private vices, if she is free, only indicates, that without delicacy, and without principles, she has so thrown off all feminine attractions, that freedom from temptation is her only, and shameful palladium. I cannot conceive any thing in the shape of a woman, more intolerably offensive and disgusting; and I believe that in eulogizing her, you did violence to your judgment and your taste, from a natural desire to make a prominent member in your party appear respectable.

Now, my dear Sir, I feel no temptation to sneer, or to reproach, and I seek not to gain an intellectu-

al victory. But I regard you as one still open to conviction. I believe you are venturing your all, for time and for eternity, on principles, weak and worthless as the spider's thread, and on principles, too, that can be so demonstrated to be contrary to common sense, that every honest mind can be made to see the inconsistency. I ask then, have you the patience, the candor, and the kindness to bear with me, while I attempt such a demonstration? Will you encourage me in the effort, by the assurance that you will endeavor to free your mind from the bias of party feeling, the pride of committed opinion, the pride of sex, and the aversion to being convicted of wrong, and examine what I offer, fairly, honestly and kindly?

Give me such assurances, and though I do not feel that I can "convert you," as you jocosely gave me leave to do, I hope I may, at least, influence you to a course of rational investigation, that, with the blessing of Heaven, may guide you into all truth.

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER II.

MY DEAR SIR:

Your kind assurances are most welcome, and I am encouraged to proceed. I am going to attempt, then, to show that your principles are at war with common sense. By this I mean, that they are principles that men of common sense never do, and never would act upon, in any of the business or interests of this life; that they are principles which no man could act upon in common affairs, without losing his character for common sense, or more probably, being lodged in a lunatic hospital.

The two main principles of your system are, in the first place, that “we are not free agents, but are governed by the necessity of fate,”—and in the second place that “there is no God.”

Now the principles involved in both these propositions, have been run into the deepest extremes of metaphysical gloom. But I do not believe it is owing to any inevitable difficulties that embarrass these subjects; for it seems to me that they not

only are capable of being rendered plain and comprehensible to all common minds, but that they actually are matters of every day thought and communication, and are as clearly understood as any principles of every day feeling and action. For this reason it is, that we shall have no difficulty in finding both language and illustration to convey all the ideas and distinctions gained by metaphysicians, and familiar not only to the most common minds, but even to children.

I will begin, then, with one of the simplest illustrations. Children, in their play, often set up a row of bricks on the end, and at such equal distances, that the fall of the first one will knock over the second, and that will overthrow the third, and so on till all are fallen.

Now ask any child engaged in this amusement, "what was the cause of the fall of the *last* brick that fell?" and he will tell you it was "the brick that stood next to it;" and if you ask for the cause of the fall of that, he will tell you it was still the next brick, and so on till you are referred to the child who gave a blow to the first brick that fell, as a cause, and finally stop at the *mind* of that child as the real cause of all. Here ask the child, "could the bricks have fallen thus if they had not been arranged in that manner?" and he will say "no." "Could they have fallen if the child or something else had not overthrown the first brick?" and he will say "no." Ask him if the bricks could help falling after they were struck, and he will say "no." Ask him if the boy could help *choosing* to

strike the first brick? and he will say “yes.” Here is the whole theory of cause and effect, free agency and necessity, and all the distinctions necessary to explain the meaning of all the terms used.

The brick that caused its next neighbor to fall is an *intermediate* or *secondary cause*; the child’s mind, or his act of choice, in knocking down the first brick, was the *primary* or *efficient cause*, and the arrangement of the bricks was a *necessary circumstance*, without which the event could not have happened. A necessary circumstance is readily distinguished from either a primary or a secondary cause. If a child should proceed still farther into inquiries after causes, he would learn the law of gravitation, which is another secondary cause; and the inquiry farther urged would bring him to the great primary or efficient Cause of all things; who formed matter and gave it all its laws and arrangements. Here it could be explained that all changes that take place in matter are caused either by some *secondary cause*, which is itself matter, as in the case of one brick knocking down another, or else by some *efficient cause*, or the volition of some mind. And it can be explained, also, how *efficient causes*, or acts of mind, sometimes act *directly* on matter, as in the case of the raising of the child’s arm when he goes to strike the first brick; and how they act through the intervention of secondary causes, as when a man’s mind plans all the arrangements of some machine, and after he has given it the first impulse, it moves

on by secondary causes, without any farther influence of his mind. So also an immensely long string of bricks, when placed at proper distances, would keep falling after the blow was given to the first one, without any farther efficiency of mind in the one that planned the arrangement, and gave the first blow.

Now all the changes that take place in matter, are traced either to a secondary cause, or to a primary and efficient cause; and nobody ever believes any change of matter to take place without some such cause. And the secondary cause is never believed to act by *any power of its own*, but only as an intermediate instrument in effecting what is in reality caused by the volition of some intelligent mind. So that all changes in matter are traced through intermediate secondary causes, back to an efficient cause, or some intelligent mind.

But there are changes or effects in *mind* for which causes are sought, as much as in the changes of matter. For example, a child sees the overthrow of the bricks before described. He feels an emotion of pleasure, and expresses it by a laugh. Now what was the cause of *that emotion* in the child's mind? It was owing, in the first place, to a certain constitution of mind, which is susceptible to pleasureable emotions at what is curious and new, which is a *necessary circumstance*; and, in the second place, to the exhibition of an event before the child which was new and curious, which is a *cause*.

The child's mind is so made that such an emotion

as necessarily arises in certain circumstances, as the brick falls down when placed in other circumstances. Such changes in mind are called *involuntary*, and are owing to a certain constitution and certain causes acting on the mind, in just the same way as causes act on matter when effects are produced.

But there is another question in regard to mind, on which the whole matter of free agency and fatalism rests, and that is, what is *the cause of choice or volition*?

Here only two explanations are given. The first is the doctrine of free agency, and the second is the doctrine of fatalism or necessity.

According to the first, *mind itself* is the cause of its own volitions; and objects of choice, or those things that excite desires, are merely the *necessary circumstance*, or *occasion* for exercising this power.

According to the second, mind is one link in a chain of causes and effects, so that every act of choice is caused by some object of desire, as necessarily and as inevitably as the emotion of surprise and pleasure was caused in the mind of the child, who witnessed the overthrow of the bricks, or as the brick was made to fall by a blow from the child.

This last is the doctrine of fate, as held by the ancient heathen philosophers, by the followers of Mahomet, by the Atheist school, by the followers of Priestly, and by a small portion of theologians who explain the doctrines of predestination and

regeneration on this philosophical theory of mental constitution. All these different advocates of fatalism, though they use different terms in explaining their views, come to the same result; which is, that volition is owing to a certain mental constitution, by which, when certain objects of desire are presented to the mind, volition or choice necessarily ensues, and so necessarily, that the mind had *no power* to choose any other way.

On the contrary theory, objects of desire are presented to the mind; and when it chooses, there existed a full power to choose any one of the objects it refused, just as much, and just the same, as it had to choose the object selected.

As an illustration of the two theories, a child strikes its parent, because he is refused an apple; and as a punishment the father chastises the child.

On the theory of fatalism, the child had no power to refrain from the volition that raised his arm against its parent, any more than he had to refrain from feeling displeased when his wishes were crossed; nor had the father any power to refrain from choosing to return the blow, any more than he had to keep from being excited by the ill conduct of his child.

On the contrary theory, the child had the same power to choose to submit quietly, as he had to choose to strike his father; and the father had the same power to choose to reason and remonstrate, as he had to choose to inflict chastisement. The anger produced in the mind of the parent and child, were necessary effects of a certain consti-



tution of mind, and of events that operated on the mind ; but the volition, or choice, was an act of the mind itself, choosing freely, in circumstances where it had full power to choose *either* of two ways.

The difficulty on this subject has been made, in a great measure, by the use of the word *cause*, without a clear distinction of the two different senses in which it is employed.

When we say that a blow of the child was the cause of the *anger* of the father, we mean that anger was caused in such a sense, that there was no other result possible, according to the constitution of nature. When we say that the misconduct of the child was the cause of the father's act of *volition* to chastise, we mean that it was an opportunity or *occasion* for exercising the power of choice.

In both cases we mean by cause, "that circumstance without which an effect would not take place ;" but in the first use of the term it means a *necessary, inevitable cause*, leaving no alternative ; in the second use of the term, it means a *necessary occasion* for exercising the power of choosing one of two or more objects, where there was an alternative, and full power to choose what was not chosen.

In the first instance *cause* means *that which necessarily and inevitably produces the event* ; in the second instance it means *an occasion necessary to enable the mind to exercise its power of choice*.

All the metaphysics and deep debate that have enshrouded this subject, terminate just in this

place, and every mind engaged in such discussions does take one of these two positions, for there are but these two that can be taken in the nature of things. For either the mind itself is the cause of its own volitions, and motives are the occasions or indispensable means of exercising this power, or else motives and the constitution of mind are the cause of choice, so that the mind has no power to choose any other way than as it does choose. On this last theory the act of choice as necessarily follows the presentation of the motive, as the needle is drawn when the loadstone is presented, or as pain is felt by the mind when hope and desire are crossed.\*

Now you have adopted the doctrine of fate, and maintain that you have no power to regulate yourself and your own destiny, but are the creature of chance and circumstances, and dependent on them for virtue and happiness. I am not going to attempt to *reason* you out of this theory, for I do not believe there is any process of reasoning that can be of any avail. All I aim at is to show that it is contrary to common sense ; so much so, that

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\* Here ought to be mentioned the theory of Dr. Emmons, held by a small number of theologians, by which God is made the direct, efficient cause of each human volition. According to this theory, every act of choice of every mind is preceded by a divine volition, as its necessary, efficient cause; just as every movement of matter is preceded by the volition of some mind as its cause. This differs from the common theory of fatalism, only in making a direct divine interference for every act of choice, instead of an arrangement of constitution and motives operating as secondary causes.

men cannot act on the assumption that it is true, in the common business of life, without losing their character as possessing reason and common sense.

Now take a single illustration as a test. A man stands beside another on a precipice. A tree falls in such a way as to throw him against his neighbor, whom he thus precipitates to instant death. Here the tree, the man, and gravitation, were causes of death. Another man stands in the same situation. His father stands beside him, whose death will secure to him immense wealth. The desire for this wealth is excited, he chooses to secure it, and as the means plunges his parent to destruction. Here, instead of the falling tree, an act of volition comes in as the cause of death.

Now what I say, is, that all rational men feel, and believe, and act, as if there was a difference in the two cases. They pity the man who involuntarily caused death. They say he was not to blame, he *could not help it*. They offer him sympathy and condolence. On the contrary they feel horror struck and indignant at the guilty parricide. They say he *could* have refrained; they imprecate punishment because he did not refrain, and they act to secure the appropriate retribution. Now I claim that any man who should attempt to punish the one who involuntarily caused death, would be called deranged; and so a man who should pity the parricide, and try to save him from punishment, on the ground that he could not help committing the crime, would equally lose his credit for rationality.

All men feel, talk, and act on the assumption that men *can* choose otherwise than they do choose. The most firm believer in fate, while he retains his senses, never *acts* on the assumption of the truth of his theory. You do not. If you find a man taking your purse from your pocket, or rifling your trunk, you never feel pity for him, as the helpless object of fatal necessity; you never talk to him as if you thought he could not help robbing you—you never *act* as if you believed so. But on the contrary, you feel, and talk, and act, just as you would if you had no theory about it, and treat him as a free agent, who had power to choose what he has not chosen.

Do you say that the belief of free agency, the feeling of indignation, and the choice to punish, in one case, and the belief of necessary constraint, the feeling of pity, and the choice to offer sympathy in the other, are the necessary effects of mental constitution, operated on by *different causes*? Why then I say that the mind, by your own admission is so formed that it necessarily believes and feels and acts on the theory that free agency is the true doctrine and fatalism false. That is, we are made, so that we cannot help believing and feeling and acting as if we were free agents.

On this admission, why do you urge a theory which you do not believe, which from the very constitution of your mind you cannot believe? You every day act in all other matters on the assumption that you are a free agent, and you treat every body else as if you believed they were free agents,

and you always think and talk on the assumption of the truth of free agency ; yet when you speculate on religion, you endeavor to ease your conscience, in a course that is contrary to its dictates by claiming that a theory is true, which your daily actions prove that you believe to be false.

Now I ask you candidly to consider whether either your theory or your conduct in regard to religion are in agreement with common sense? And if a man must expect to have his interests and his happiness in this life ruined by acting contrary to the dictates of common sense, is there not as much reason to fear that he will ruin them for eternity by such a course in regard to religion ?

I come now to the other main principle of your system that "there is no God."

You will not deny the fact that every mind invariably does believe that every change in matter, and every new existence has some cause. It is of small consequence how this belief originates ; whether it be an implanted constitutional principle, or the effect of experience, or the result of instruction, every mind does have this conviction, and so strongly too, that nothing can appear more incredible or absurd, than to assert, that some change in matter took place without any cause.

At the same time we as invariably regard contrivance as proof of an *intelligent* cause. Whenever we find any plan or design contrived, we invariably refer it to some intelligent being as the contriver. If it were asserted that particles of cotton and glue, by mere chance, without any

cause or contriver, happened to stick together, so as to form a sheet of paper, and that types happened to fall on it so as to print a newspaper, nobody could believe ; nothing could be mentioned more incredible and absurd. Every body would believe that there was a cause, and an intelligent cause for such an effect. All the business of life turns on the conviction of this truth. Nothing ever occurs, but what the first inquiry is for the cause, and almost every employment is regulated by a knowledge of causes and their appropriate effects.

If a man should start out into society, and begin to act on the theory that the changes and existences around him came without cause, he would soon be regarded as a lunatic.

But the theory of the Atheist is in exact contradiction to the first principle of common sense. He assumes that there was a time when all the innumerable and wonderful contrivances of nature, sprang into existence in all their wonderful wisdom and variety without any cause. He would look upon a splendid piece of painting with admiration at the skill of some unknown author, and would call a man a lunatic, who should believe that all those varied lights and shades, and blending colors happened to fall on the canvass in just that arrangement without any guiding hand. And yet he will claim that the magnificent realities of which the picture is but a shadow, came into such beauty, order, and proportion without any cause, as the mere work of chance. He puts the period far

back in distant ages, when matter, having existed inert from all eternity, without any cause, begins to move its particles, and to form worlds, with all their various garniture of rivers, mountains, woods, and plains, with fruits, and flowers, and animals, and man, and all so beautifully and wisely contrived that the making and printing of a newspaper, or the arrangement of lines and colors in a painting, in comparison to it, are mere fools' play.

The only way in which Atheists have ever attempted to escape the absurdity of their doctrine is by a fallacy in language, which in fact is a perfect contradiction, though they do not seem to know it. They who attempt this, allow that every contrivance and every change does have a cause, and then to escape the doctrine of a Great First Cause or Creator, they maintain that every thing has continued from eternity moving on as it does now by secondary causes ; that there never was a time when trees and fruits, and flowers, and animals, and man were not existing, to decay and be re-organized as they now appear.

But the deception is here. They allow the principle of common sense that all motion or change in matter must have a cause ; that every thing that ever existed had a preceding cause, and that each of these preceding causes itself was caused. This is the same as saying that every thing that has existed had a beginning, for whatever was caused had a beginning. Now this is allowing a truth which makes the assertion that there has been an infinite series of causes and effects from

all eternity, a contradiction, and of course, an absurdity. It is the same as saying that each particular existence had a beginning, and yet that all put together they are without a beginning. It is as contradictory and as absurd as it would be to say that there was a chain, each particular link of which hung on something, and yet that the whole chain itself was hanging on nothing. For if there never was anything but what had a beginning, so that we can say of each individual part of a series there was a time when *this* did not exist, it is a contradiction to say that this series has existed from eternity. It is the same as saying that every thing had a beginning, and yet that every thing had not a beginning. What contrivance is more curious than an infinite series of causes and effects? Now this must have had a contriver, or it is an eternal example of what to the human mind is the greatest of all absurdities, a design, without designer or cause. Atheists have put this contradiction in a form of language that hides its absurdity, by a fallacy in the use of terms, such as the ancient sophists used to employ in their childish speculations.

There are then but two possible suppositions. One is, that from all eternity there existed an Almighty mind, himself uncaused and without beginning, and the cause of all the contrivances and changes in nature. The other is, that all these changes and contrivances exist without a cause. The last is the theory of the Atheist, and what I



am attempting is, to show that it is so contrary to common sense, that if a man should act as if he believed it, he would be deemed deranged. And now I put the question to your honesty, do you not allow that if you found a man really believing new and curious contrivances to be the effect of chance, and acting and talking on this assumption, you would think him a lunatic? Suppose, for example, some curious contrivance were presented, and he should honestly and seriously assert that it was formed by chance atoms of matter that happened to stick together in that form, and you should perceive him planning and acting on the supposition that every thing else was the result of mere chance, would not you, would not every rational man say he was without common sense?

I ask then, how can it be rational to assume a theory in religion and act upon it, which if you act upon it in any other matter proves you a fool? Is not the risk of eternal happiness of as much importance as the business and pleasures of a few years? If it is folly to risk small matters on such a theory, is it not surpassing folly to venture on its truth your all, and for eternity? For what proof have you that you shall not live forever and be forever capable of suffering? Did any man, ever bring a single iota of proof to establish this? And if you cannot prove it by the slightest shade of evidence, then there is infinite risk in taking the unsafe side. It seems then that you are venturing the eternal happiness of a future existence on the

truth of a theory that you could not act on in any other matter without proving yourself deranged.

My friend, I here leave the matter to your candor, to your honesty, and to that love of truth which you claim.

Your friend, &c.

### LETTER III.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am not necessarily involved in the difficulty, for which you make such good natured allowance, of charging those who hold your sentiments with being devoid of common sense. It is only that portion of those who, holding your opinions, really attempt *to act* on their principles, that fairly come under this implication.

There is a class of minds, of which I consider Robert Owen and Fanny Wright as specimens, who, while wanting in that fine mental balance called common sense, are supplied with a large amount of enthusiasm. Such a combination, if united with a contemplative turn of mind and lively imagination, often leads to that mysticism whose votaries reside in a world of imagination and feeling. But when united to an active and fearless temperament, and under certain influences, it tends to that practical Atheism, which is exhibited in the projects and visionary efforts of Owen and Fanny Wright.

But such sort of sceptical men as you, who have common sense enough to preserve you from acting upon your principles, become such in various ways. I know one man who became a universal sceptic, from the mere love of argument, and a sort of contrariness that always made him take the wrong side in every debate. He thus formed such a habit of sophistical reasoning, and was so perpetually warring against the laws of evidence and belief, that finally his mind was unloosed from all moorings, afloat on the wide sea, without chart, compass, or helm. I have known another arrive at scepticism in this manner. Brought up by pious parents, in one of the strictest sects of religionists, he was taught a long system of doctrines and philosophy, which he received on trust, without inquiry or rational investigation. Possessing a bold, inquiring, and active mind, when withdrawn from parental influence, his faith was questioned, and he began to examine its foundation.

When thrown upon defence, he found himself without ammunition, without skill and without weapons, for all had been left at home, except the badge of a sect that always provokes attacks. He found his religious faith entangled with a philosophy at war with common sense, and unable to discriminate, in attempting to disenthral his mind from some things really false and unreasonable, he threw aside also some fundamental truth. He had clearness of vision to detect the necessary connection of this truth with another, and this also

he cast away. Unguided, fearless and charmed with liberty, he still proceeded until all was thrown off, and as he supposed, he stood in perfect liberty, accountable neither to God or man.

Other men have been made Atheists by the united force of strong passions, urging on to unlawful indulgence, and a sensitive conscience tormenting them in this course, while they sought as a relief, the destruction of all principles of right and wrong, and all belief of accountability and a future state.

Were your own mental history written, perhaps it would partially embrace all these causes. You were educated strictly in the faith and morality of your parents ; you took your creed simply on trust, without any knowledge of the evidences on which it rests ; you were thrown among sceptical men enough to hear their specious arguments, and at the same time among religious persons of rather inferior abilities, with whom you took the wrong side in debate, and reasoned yourself farther and farther from the truth. With a fearless and independent mind, you frankly avowed your sentiments, till you were committed as an opposer of religion, and then all the pride of committed opinion and party spirit urged you on. At the same time, conscience reproached you, and there remained some lingering fears of future retributions, urging you on to more strenuous efforts to relieve your mind, and now you are—what you are.

Here, my friend, I have presented the fairest side of this downward, and what I hold to be guilty

course. I am no advocate for the innocence of wrong belief. I believe that every one of these cases were occasioned mainly, by that aversion to moral restraint, that indifference to the dictates of reason and duty, that insensibility and indolence, which influence all men more or less, to neglect moral and religious obligations, and then to seek some method to ease their conscience. No one of these cases as I believe, would have occurred, had the individuals uniformly followed the dictates of conscience, and in all cases reasoned and acted according to the best light and knowledge they could gain. A constant sense of guilty inconsistencies was the latent main spring, that secretly moved every thing wrong, while all the other circumstances were merely conspiring and subordinate causes.

I have in my preceding letter endeavored to show that your principles are opposed to common sense, and in this, that it was your common sense, that saved you from embarking your reputation, property, and talents in an attempt to carry your theory out into practice, like Owen and his followers. But it has not saved you from advocating and defending their principles and efforts. Now I wish to suggest some considerations that, to such a mind as yours, may be of some value.

Every thing in nature and in morals, is constructed on general laws, which being sustained regularly and steadily, lead to incalculable good, while at the same time they involve some *incidental* evils. Take for example the law of gravita-

tion, and calculate if you can all the benefits that arise from its unchanging certainty and regularity, and still more, calculate all the confusion, havoc, and ruin that would ensue were this regularity destroyed. But yet gravitation involves some evils, such as bruises, dislocated bones, toppling spires, and falling turrets. The existence of fire and water also, include an immense amount of comfort and convenience; their destruction would bring incalculable anguish, dismay, and death. But let any person put out of view all the benefits secured by these agents, and collect together all the miseries caused by conflagrations, storms, shipwrecks, and other similar accidents, and it would present a most appalling picture. Now Robert Owen and his followers proceed on a principle which, if carried out, would banish gravitation and destroy fire and water, on account of the incidental evils they involve. They spend their time and breath in collecting and portraying the evil passions, persecutions, and contentions engendered by religion, the injurious action of law, the evils attending the marriage relation, and the family state, and on account of these incidental evils would labor to banish all the blessings secured by these healthful and indispensable institutions. If they should proceed still farther in carrying out their principles, they would be seen roaming through the world, boasting of their superior wisdom while destroying fire with water, and water with fire, as mischievous principles no longer to be tolerated.

I have never seen or heard of anything attempt-

ed by persons who have claims to rationality and to an enlightened education, that to me, seemed more like the wild vagaries of lunacy, than the establishment of Robert Owen at New Harmony. To collect together a company of persons, of all varieties of age, taste, habits, and pre-conceived opinions, and teach them that there is no God, no future state, no retributions after death, no revealed standard of right and wrong, and no free agency; that the laws that secure private property are a nuisance, that religion is a curse, that marriage is a vexatious restraint, that the family state is needless and unwise, and then to expect such a community to dwell together in harmony, and practice upon the rules of benevolence, what can be conceived more childish or improbable, by any person who has seen the world or known any thing of human nature? And yet such is the plan and expectation of the leaders of practical Atheism. Their experiment, will probably prove one of the best antidotes to their wild theories.

And now, my friend, I have finished all that I aimed to attempt in commencing this correspondence. I am sure your reason and conscience are on my side, when I urge that the course you are taking is not only contrary to common sense, but dangerous and wicked. What good are you gaining by the course you pursue? What peace or enjoyment do your atheistical principles secure, that the sincere Christian has not attained, with hopes and consolations the Atheist can never know? I do not believe your intellect or your conscience



is satisfied with the position you hold, or that you are free from fears of disastrous results. I cannot believe that a mind like yours, can walk abroad through this beautiful world, beneath its glorious canopy of light, and not feel, and sometimes tremble, at those evidences of Almighty being and agency, that flame from the sun, sparkle in the stars, echo in the thunder, breathe in the winds, murmur in the waters, exhale from the flowers, and warble from the groves. And I am sure that sometimes in your hours of depression and sorrow, your desolate spirit sighs for brighter hopes and surer foundations than any on which you can now repose. You are beginning to take the downward path of life; the hey-day of youth and enterprize is past; you have tasted about all that this world has to give; death has again and again invaded your domestic circle, and every year as age approaches, one star after another will drop from your sky.

To the Christian, surrounded by the sharers of his hopes, these loved and parting lights of life glide away to wait his arrival in a purer sphere; to you they are sinking to blackness of darkness forever. And as each year, your passage to the tomb becomes more desolate and dim, no glimmer of hope arises to cheer, but all around is darkness, silence, and interminable gloom.

Were it alone for this life, I would urge you to light the torch of hope at the altar of revelation, and seek a happier and brighter path. But who can tell the awful realities that may burst on your

startled vision, when death removes the transient veil. How dare you trust the hazard? How dare you, endowed as you are with such susceptibilities of joy and woe, how dare you risk eternity on such a chance?

My friend, I know I can do little to restore the principles of faith and hope, especially by the desultory, disconnected efforts of my pen, and I am not going to attempt anything more in this way. For I know of a better method, and if I can persuade you to embrace it, all that I could do, and far more will be speedily secured; if I cannot persuade you to this, nothing I can write farther on this subject would be of any avail. You are within the reach of the talents, the learning, and the friendship of my friend L——. He is one whom you would respect for his talents and acquirements, and love for his sincerity and benevolence. He is one who would feel the deepest interest in such a mind as yours, and any approaches you may make will be most cordially met. I beseech you, sir, do not refuse me this; it may be the last, the only opportunity of securing truth and happiness for eternity. If it will cost you some effort, some sacrifice of pride, or fastidiousness, or ease, and your mind turns away, let me waken the chords of past memories and as from the grave, implore you in those gentle tones, that soothed your infancy, cheered your childhood and blest your youth. For her sake, whose purity formed your taste, whose faithfulness regulated your early habits, whose piety

nothing, in short, by which the full and proper meaning of any written composition is gained, can avail to relieve the passage from the difficulties you suppose. I have never heard you advance one yet, but what I felt *sure*, that if you would only give me your time and attention, I could convince you that the difficulty arose simply from want, on your part, of knowledge of some circumstances not known, or not taken into consideration, that so modified the meaning, or explained the supposed inconsistency, as to relieve the difficulty.

And I would here suggest one consideration, and that is, that almost all the difficulties urged by infidels against the Bible, relate to matters of little importance, as it respects practical individual interest. If a man wishes to know what *he* must do to secure eternal life, and to be most useful and happy in this world, he does not encounter all these difficulties in regard to interpretation that demand such learning, reasoning, and investigation. It is only those men who are determined to prove falsehoods, inconsistencies, and absurdities, in the Bible, and those advocates of christianity who must *meet these attacks*, that demand such an array of knowledge and skill. To the plain and honest mind, sincerely seeking for the path of duty and the way to heaven, the Bible is so plain and simple, that "he that runneth may read, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err."

I will conclude by urging upon you what I am

sure, with my present views, you will think, as a friend and a Christian, I am bound to urge. Will you now, without delay, enter upon those investigations that are to decide your eternal happiness, with the same energy and diligence that you give to your professional duties?

Let me suggest what it seems to me is the only fair and safe method for you to take.

It is a *practical* question. You are to act hereafter on the assumption, either that christianity is true, or that it is false. Of course you are to ascertain which of these positions has the *balance* of evidence in its favor; which has the most proof, and involves the fewest difficulties.

To do this properly you ought, in the first place, to secure all the *positive evidence* you can reach, *in favor* of christianity. Then seek all the difficulties and objections, and fairly investigate how far they are owing to ignorance on your part, and how far they are insuperable, unanswerable objections. This last demands much research, the aid of learned men, and many books, especially if you are determined that you will not allow the claims of the Bible till every possible difficulty of every kind is met and removed.

When this is done, *one half* is accomplished. Then take the other half, and first find out how much *positive evidence* you have that the Bible *is not* a divine authoritative revelation.

Then collect all the difficulties that occur on the supposition that the Bible is false. These are all

arranged under one of two necessary suppositions. For if the Bible is false, it was written by wicked men who intended to deceive, or by men who through ignorance, or misjudgment, or fanaticism, were duped themselves, and tried to dupe others. To judge of this matter fairly, read all the absurdities involved by *either* supposition, as you find them presented by the defenders of christianity, and above all, *read the Bible through*, and see what you can make of it, and how many difficulties you can find, on the supposition that the writers were either knaves or dupes.

When you have done all this, then, and not till then, you are fitted to decide whether you may take the dangerous side of a question on which eternity is suspended. And in forming a practical decision, you are bound to act on the maxims of safety and honesty which regulate your decisions in all other matters; you are bound to take the side which has the *balance of evidence* in its favor, and the one that *involves the least risk*.

If you refuse to take this course, from aversion, or indolence, or pride of opinion, or unwillingness to assume the duties that christianity urges, can you ever hereafter honestly maintain that the control of your belief is not in your power, or that you are an infidel because there is not evidence enough of the truth of christianity to secure your belief? Will you not go through life with the secret, ever recurring uneasiness of a guilty conscience, and the sad forebodings of evil to come, when your transitory days of probation are past?

Oh that you could but for one day, know the peace, the happiness, the blessed hopes from which you turn away, for then arguments would be needed no more !

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER VI.

(TO ANOTHER PERSON.)

MY DEAR SIR :

In regard to the subject of our late conversation, it seems to me your difficulties all resolve themselves into this short statement. "I have examined the evidences of christianity, and they do not produce conviction ; and if it *were* established as a divine revelation, there are thousands of opinions as to what it teaches, so that no one can tell which is right, while at the same time it contains some things so contrary to my reason that I cannot believe it."

In regard to the first part of the statement, that you have examined the evidences of christianity, and they do not produce conviction, I would say that it appears to me, that the great difficulty arises from a habit of thinking of christianity as a merely *speculative* question, where the thing involved is simply what you shall *believe*, and not what you shall *do* ; whereas in reality it is a *practical* question, where every man is necessarily obliged to

act either on the assumption that it is true, or that it is false. You look upon an effort to convince you of the truth of christianity, as you would upon an attempt to convince you of a certain theory in regard to the tides, or some geological theory, or any matter of mere speculation, where belief will make no difference with any of your feelings or actions. You just hold your mind in readiness to *receive evidence*, and are passively waiting to be convinced, just as if you had nothing else to do. But the case is very different. It is above all others, an immediately *practical* question, which involves the thoughts, feelings, and actions, of every day life, and where belief will modify our views of almost every duty. As I said in conversation, it is a case where you cannot help acting on the assumption that christianity is false, if you do not act as if it were true. For if christianity is true, then there is a future eternal existence for every human being, and our conduct in this transient scene decides our happiness forever, and every man is in danger of losing eternal happiness, and incurring endless suffering; and the *chief business* of life should be, to prepare ourselves and others for eternity, while all earthly plans, pursuits, and enjoyments, should be estimated in value, just in proportion as they promote or retard this main object.

If christianity be true, it alters the expediency and duty of a thousand practical matters. If it be true, it often would be wrong and unwise to take a course, which would be prudent and right were it false. For if christianity be false, and we know



of nothing beyond the grave, then we are bound simply to consult how we can secure for ourselves and others the most enjoyment in this life ; but if it be true, then we must make all our decisions turn on what is *safest*, in reference to the hazards of eternity. I have sometimes heard you say, that the course that Christians take is for their best interest and happiness, whether christianity be true or not. But this is a mistake. Look at our self denying friend P——. Do you suppose he is going to enjoy as much *in this world*, living, as he expects to do, a wanderer, without fame, without honor, without family ties, without the indulgence of his cultivated taste, with the prospect of a laborious, anxious life, and the probabilities of an early death, as he would if he believed, as you do, that all would be well in a future state for himself and others, and then should remain at home with his family, marry happily, seek fame and fortune, and that too with as fair a prospect as ever opened to a youthful aspirant ? No, my friend, you know that he looks beyond this world for his “recompense of reward,” and that, were it not for religion, as the apostle said, he would be “of all men most miserable.”

I do assure you that devoted and intelligent Christians do not take a course which would be wisest and happiest were there no future state. True it is that “godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that to come,” and all other things being equal, the pious man is far happier than any other man. But it is not because

he always takes the course that will secure him the most *temporal* enjoyment, nor because he secures what would be best and happiest were religion false ; but because in making sacrifices and subjecting himself to self denial and mental discipline, religion makes him a full compensation. Banish his hope for a future life, destroy his confidence in God, the sense of his superintending love and care, the gratitude that glows in his bosom and makes his labors light, and though he still is happier in a virtuous life than he would be if vicious, yet you change him to another man, and alter essentially his plans, and hopes, and efforts ; much that before seemed good would now become emptiness, and much that seemed evil would be called good.

You are a man acting on the assumption that christianity is false. For let it be made certain by the fullest evidence, that there were no God, no future existence, and no retributions after death, to you every thing would remain the same. It would not change a single iota in any of your plans. But to such a man as P—— every thing would be changed. All his present interests, efforts, and plans would be altered or relinquished, and so, to a greater or less extent, it would be with every sincere and consistent Christian.

Now when I urge you to become a Christian, I do not insist on the duty of seeing and feeling all the evidence that I see and feel. I do not insist that there are no difficulties to be met in religion, when they are to be met in every thing be-

side. I only claim, that on account of its paramount importance, you are bound to give to this subject more attention and interest than you give to any other; that before you decide against it, it is your duty to know *all* on this subject that is within your reach, on both sides, and then to determine which side has the greatest weight of evidence, and *act* consistently with that decision.

If christianity be true, then act to secure eternal life for yourself and others, as the first and all engrossing pursuit. If it be false, then act to secure all the good this life can give, without any reference to the future, and take as your motto, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The second part of the statement is, that were the Bible proved true, there are so many thousand opinions about what it contains, that no one can tell which is right. Much of this difficulty may be obviated by one consideration. The various opinions as to what the Bible teaches relate to a thousand different subjects; to matters of history, questions of morality, modes of interpretation, questions of church polity, questions as to the rites and ceremonies of the church, and a long list of other things about which men differ in opinion, and appeal to the Bible as umpire.

But when a man goes to the Bible to ascertain his own individual interests and duty, when he asks, "what am I *to do* to secure eternal blessedness?" the matter is narrowed down to a small point, and on this there are not such diversities of opinion, but rather remarkable unanimity. True,

there are diversities of opinion about many matters connected with it, and there are some things that are claimed to be equally safe and good, as substitutes for it; but those who receive the Bible as a revelation from God, all allow that, however many *other* things there may be, there is *one* thing that will secure eternal life. I state the proposition in this form.

*Any man who sincerely and habitually loves his Maker, so as to make it the chief object of interest and effort to discover his will and to obey it, will secure eternal happiness.*

Give this statement to the Espiscopalian, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Quaker, the Swedenborgian, the Unitarian, and every other Protestant sect I can think of, and they will unanimously yield their assent. Give it even to the Catholic, and though the dogmas of his infallible church forbid, he will evade the negative by his hopes of mercy for sins of ignorance that may be forgiven. It is true some think there is no great danger of losing eternal happiness, some urge that other things are of very great importance, some suppose that other things will suffice without this, but all agree that *this is taught by the Bible*, and that *this is safe*. Even the infidel who disallows divine revelation on the subject, joins in sustaining such a course as safest and best. Here, then, on the only point where I urge your attention and duty, what *you* must do to be safe and happy forever, there is one unanimous response, that the Bible teaches this one thing without doubt and without mistake. And no one ca-

vils but those who refuse to do this duty. All who do it find no difficulties on this point in the Bible.

In regard to the last difficulty, that the Bible teaches what is contrary to your reason, so that you cannot believe it, I would say that there seems to be great vagueness of conception on this matter of what is *contrary to reason*, in the minds of the great multitude who use the expression. Every body who finds any thing he does not like, or does not fully comprehend in the Bible, slides behind this covert, and declares he cannot believe it, because it is contrary to his reason. The Universalist cannot believe in eternal punishments, because it is contrary to his reason; the Unitarian cannot believe the Trinity, because it is contrary to his reason; the Socinian cannot believe in the existence of good and evil angels, because it is contrary to his reason; the Deist cannot believe in the miracles that attest christianity, because it is contrary to his reason; the Atheist cannot believe in a God and his superintending providence, because it is contrary to his reason.

I would just ask, then, what is meant by "being contrary to reason." So far as I have been able to ascertain, in many cases it means either "contrary to my preconceived notions," or else "contrary to my wishes."

But I suppose there is such a thing as reason, and that some things are contrary to it, and also that we ought not to receive as truth any thing that is thus contrary. Now you are a clear minded and honest man, and do not mean to maintain

that a thing is contrary to reason, simply because it is contrary to your wishes and preconceived opinions. You mean something else; will you allow me to try to find out what it is?

The facts of the case seem to be these. There are certain truths believed by all mankind, and adopted as maxims of practical conduct, and all the every day concerns of life are conducted on the mutual acknowledgment of the truth of these maxims.

For example, all the business of man with man, proceeds on the assumption of personal identity, so that we continue the same persons to-day that we were yesterday, and are accountable for past conduct. In like manner men assume that there is a material world around us, and that our senses may be trusted in learning its qualities. So also they assume that every effect has a cause, and that contrivances are proofs of an intelligent contriver. So also they assume that past experience is proof of what the future will be, so that what has been, will continue to be, unless there appears some cause for its destruction. So also they allow that human testimony is to be trusted, unless there is some assignable cause for distrust.

Belief in some of these maxims is called intuitive, or intuition, because it results from the very constitution of mind, while belief in other truths is the result of experience and observation. Now it is these maxims which are called the principles of reason, and whatever is contrary to them is said to be contrary to reason. And when we use the

in seeking for all the evidence within your reach.

Now, in regard to the value of the interests involved, it is the happiness of *eternity*, in view of which, all the interests of time sink to a point. The question is "Am I to live forever,—if so, how am I to secure endless happiness?" The subject is one, whose value demands more anxious, diligent, honest, faithful investigation, than any thing, or all things beside. The study of your profession, the regulation of your estate, the care of your reputation, each, or all, are as the light dust of the balance, compared with this momentous subject. And yet, permit me to express my fears, that you have given more attention to almost any other subject, than this.

Though I have no means of knowing how much time you have devoted to such investigations, I have a method of determining something, in regard to the amount of attention you have given; a method, which in other cases you would employ, and deem a proper mode of judging.

Suppose I should attempt to argue some question with you, involving certain principles or facts in your profession, which even the earliest law student understands, and I should betray entire ignorance on those points. You would not need to ask me how much time I had bestowed, in investigating these subjects; one single remark from me, might convince you, that I was entirely ignorant of the very first principles of your profession.

I have the same data, for judging in your case.

In conversation with you, I have heard you make remarks respecting the Bible, its evidences, or the inconsistencies of its contents, that betrayed a want of information on the subject, that would have astonished me, had I not found it so very common among sceptical men.

It certainly is matter for surprise, and wonder, that men, who, on all other subjects of general interest, in matters of science, taste, politics, history, and polite literature, would blush to find themselves faltering at first principles, should be not only so ill informed, but so entirely unconscious of their deficiencies; and that, on a subject of all others, the most important, the most interesting, and the most obligatory. And yet, so common have I found this to be the case, that, whenever I meet a sceptical man, however erudite, however rational, however profound, on other subjects, I expect as a matter of course, to find him ignorant on this. There are exceptions to every general rule, but I have seldom, if ever, known one here.

The knowledge of sceptical men on this subject, generally consists, not of the results of serious, extensive, systematic investigations, but of the ill-defined impressions of early education, or the desultory gleanings of general reading and conversation, or the disconnected discourses of religious teachers.

Now you have the power of examining the evidence of christianity, and the difficulties you suppose to be connected with it, just as you do the



evidence on a case you are to bring before the courts of the nation. Would you risk your legal reputation before our high courts, as you risk your soul before high Heaven? Would you go before the judges and conflicting counsel, with a case involving your own reputation, and important interests to your clients, until you knew *all* that was to be said on *both* sides? But can you say, that you have ever even attempted such a thorough, and regular examination of both sides, in a question, on which your dearest interests hang, and where a mistake may be vainly bewailed, through never ceasing ages? My dear Sir, I beseech you review this case, and see if you have not much to do, before you can plead innocence for wrong belief, on such a subject as this!

One other question, and I have done. Is not this a case, where one course secures every benefit without hazard, and the other course, without any gain, incurs immense risk? Do you lose any thing by becoming a sincere and consistent Christian, in respectability, happiness, or safety? Do you run any more risk for eternity, than in your present course? On the contrary, is not *all* the risk in the path you are now pursuing, and with no advantages to repay the hazard? Is not this course contrary to one of the plainest dictates of common sense?

Bear with me, I beseech you, my dear Sir, for it is not my fault, if what I urge, is painful and offensive. If it is *truth*, will it not bring at least

one charm to a mind that claims to be its votary? If it is urged with sincerity, and warmth of friendship, has it not another claim on your patience and kindness?

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER V.

MY DEAR SIR:

I cannot say that the point where you meet me in my last, was altogether unexpected. You claim that you are well informed on the subject, when you express your opinions about the Bible, and its evidences, and inconsistencies. You say you have read Paley, and the valuable article in the Encyclopedia, and several other works, and have given much thought and attention to the subject, and that, if the revelation of Heaven is so recondite, that with all this, you are so very deficient, this is an argument against it. If a man of intelligence, after such examination of the subject, is a mere tyro, entirely unfitted to pronounce an opinion, how, you ask, are the ignorant, the weak, the undisciplined, to gain an eternal blessedness, for the attainment of which, so much study and investigation are necessary?

Without answering your question directly, I will simply state to you my views on the subject.

There are two ways, in which the Bible can be

received. The first, is what may be called the *practical common sense* way. By this method, a man of plain sense, without investigation or study, without any thing but the book itself, and the knowledge he gains by contact with the world around him, arrives at satisfactory results. In the first place, he finds the Bible to be a book, which almost every body he knows, who is honest and learned, and virtuous, and has examined the subject, says is a revelation from God, attested by such evidence as is perfectly full, and satisfactory to *their* minds. Now ask such a man why he believes there is such a place as China, when he gives his money to send the Bible there, and he can give no better reason, than that people of sense and honesty, who have the best means of knowing, all believe so. In both cases, he very wisely rests his confidence on the sense and honesty of others, who have better opportunity than he has for knowing the truth.

Such a man, in reflecting on the subject of religion, finds himself a being, capable of boundless enjoyment, and dreadful suffering; that he is in a world, where all are quickly passing off into another state of being; that the common belief is, that we are to exist after death, and that our future happiness is to be decided by our conduct and character here. He finds all around, in the works of nature, the evidence of the existence of a Creator, wise, powerful, and benevolent. He thinks it is natural to expect, that such a being would require his creatures to act right, and to obey his will. He finds there is great difficulty in finding

out what is right and wrong, in many cases, and that we need a directory, to inform us what the will of the Creator is, and how we are to secure future happiness after death, and he thinks it natural, and reasonable, that such a directory should be provided. He takes the Bible, and finds it tells of just such a God as he would expect to find, from what his works teach. He finds it does require mankind to act right, and to obey their Maker. He finds that it is a full and perfect directory, as to what is right, and what is wrong. He finds it declares, that there is a future state of existence, that there is great danger of taking such a course here, as to ruin us forever, and that the way of safety and happiness, is therein fully disclosed. He finds nothing required of him, but what is for his interest and happiness, and for the good of his fellow men. He finds, in looking through society, that those who honor and obey the precepts of the Bible, are the most prosperous and happy, and that there is much good, and comparatively very little evil, in receiving it as the guide of our life.

True, he finds many things he cannot understand, many things he cannot explain. He perceives that a thousand puzzling questions can be asked, that he cannot answer, about writings so old, so full of varied matter, and written for so many different purposes, by so many different persons, and at such distant periods of time.

But he sees that what God requires of him is plain enough. He sees there is no risk in taking this to be true, and acting on the assumption. He

sees there is much hazard and folly in acting as if it were false. And so, with a sincere and honest mind, he takes it as the guide of his thoughts, words, and actions, and makes it his chief object of interest, to discover and to obey the will of his Creator, as it is there expressed.

In doing this, the man assumes that to be true which has much positive evidence in its favor—which has the *balance* of evidence in its favor, and which secures all the good without any of the risk of a contrary course. This, therefore, is what I call the common sense method of treating the Bible.

The other is what I would denominate the *sceptical method*. It consists in assuming the position, and in acting upon it, that the Bible is not an authoritative, divine revelation, because there are apparent difficulties and inconsistencies in regard to the truth of its history, the consistency of its contents with our notions of propriety, and the reasonableness of what it reveals respecting the dispensations of God, and the realities of the invisible world. For as religion is a *practical* concern, where men are obliged to take one of two courses, every man who does not receive christianity as true, so as to make it the rule of faith and practice necessarily takes the other position, that it is false. *You* take this position. *You* refuse to submit yourself to the rules and duties of christianity, on the ground that its claims are false. And you assume that it is false, not because there is no positive evidence in its favor, for you do not deny the evidence adduced by Paley and others. But your decision

rests on the assumption that there is so much contradictory evidence of one sort and another, that it nullifies all the positive evidence in its favor. You say it contains absurdities, contradictions, violations of morality, of justice, and of propriety. You say that many things contained in it are childish, and unworthy of a divine origin ; and others are so contrary to your reason, that it is impossible for you to receive them as true.

Now I claim for the Bible that privilege and right to which every honest man in society is entitled. When a man has, for a long course of years, maintained a reputation that has defied the efforts of malice, calumny, and suspicion, and so outlived a thousand attacks, as to come out fairer and more respected after every onset, and still stands among all his cotemporaries as a true, an honest, and a virtuous man, he has a claim upon every member of the community, that he shall not lose his hard earned character for any trifling cause. It is his right, that whatever appears inconsistent with his known character, should be regarded as a mistake, until it is fairly and fully proved against him. And if any one comes forward and denounces him as a man without veracity, or without honesty, the instances must be proved that establish these charges, by the clearest evidence, so that there can be no way of escaping the conclusion. If there is *any* way of supposing a misunderstanding or a mistake, it is to be taken, rather than to cast away the established reputation and character of years.

And should the character of such a man be called in question, the one who assumes that some apparent inconsistencies can be some how explained, (though he is ignorant of the method,) so as not to involve destruction of character, certainly has far less responsibility resting upon him, than the man who declares that such inconsistencies are proofs of dishonesty and villainy, and runs the risk of a trial for slander on this assumption.

Now the Bible has equal and superior claims. For centuries it has withstood every species of attack that malice, ridicule, wit, and hatred, could invent. And yet it has constantly advanced in the veneration and the respect of all who have the best means of understanding its claims, and of the world at large.

The plain, unlearned man, therefore, acts very wisely in receiving it with reverence and trust, after such an ordeal as this; and when he finds what seem to him difficulties or contradictions, he as wisely supposes that it is his own want of knowledge that creates the difficulty, rather than the unworthiness of the record.

But the sceptic decides to call in question the character of the Bible, and to risk all the terrific interests of an immortal existence, on the chance of proving falsehoods, absurdities, and contradictions in the Bible. Here then is the place where I rest my charge, that sceptical men are ignorant and incompetent. To allow the character and claims of the Bible, demands little investigation and little study. But to stand up as a champion



to cast down all the host of credible witnesses, and that too by evidence that establishes inconsistencies, absurdities, and falsehood, demands an extent of erudition, an amount of research, a thoroughness of investigation, and an acuteness of reasoning such as few can boast.

To do this, the sceptic needs to understand the original languages of scripture, in order to gain the original sense, for often a difficulty is the result of some mistake in translation. He needs to know the customs, habits, country, manners, controversies, and philosophy of the age in which the different books of scripture were written, for such knowledge often removes apparent inconsistencies. He needs to know all about the peculiar idioms of the original language, he needs to study the scope of the composition, and to learn the objects aimed at by the writer, for these things often modify essentially the meaning of a passage. If the question is one of *morality*, he needs to know whether all the circumstances of the case are told—he needs to know the object of the divine legislator, and a multitude of other things, that are indispensable data for deciding. For with all the claims the Bible urges on the confidence and respect of mankind, no one has a right to assume that any thing in it is inconsistent, false, or absurd, till he has proved that there is no other assumption possible. And no man can do this, without an amount of skill and learning such as no sceptic ever did or ever will possess. Thousands have attempted it, and been convinced that it was their own igno-

rance, and not any defect in the Bible, that caused doubt and distrust. It is in such attempts as these, that sceptical men betray their ignorance. I have heard you sometimes bring forward difficulties in the Bible, as proofs of the inconsistency of its claims, that I believe half the older pupils in our Sabbath schools could show originated, not in the Bible, but in the deficient information of the objector.

I grant that you have done all you claim, in investigating the evidences of christianity. You have done enough to make it rational and safe for you to act on the assumption of its truth, without farther investigation, for you run no risk in such a decision, either for time or eternity. But if you take the position that the Bible is false in its claims, and that you can prove it, and that you will risk eternity on your success, you must allow me still to insist, that for such an undertaking, you, and all the sceptical men I ever saw, are entirely unqualified, and that, were you to run the gauntlet with the defenders of any science or profession, with equally imperfect qualifications, you would expect, and would receive merited disgrace.

Recall, now, one single difficulty that you have ever met in the Bible, where you would venture your fortune or your reputation on the chances of so proving an inconsistency, or an absurdity, or a falsehood, that no critical skill in the original languages, no study of the scope and object of the passage, no knowledge of attending circumstances,

nothing, in short, by which the full and proper meaning of any written composition is gained, can avail to relieve the passage from the difficulties you suppose. I have never heard you advance one yet, but what I felt *sure*, that if you would only give me your time and attention, I could convince you that the difficulty arose simply from want, on your part, of knowledge of some circumstances not known, or not taken into consideration, that so modified the meaning, or explained the supposed inconsistency, as to relieve the difficulty.

And I would here suggest one consideration, and that is, that almost all the difficulties urged by infidels against the Bible, relate to matters of little importance, as it respects practical individual interest. If a man wishes to know what *he* must do to secure eternal life, and to be most useful and happy in this world, he does not encounter all these difficulties in regard to interpretation that demand such learning, reasoning, and investigation. It is only those men who are determined to prove falsehoods, inconsistencies, and absurdities, in the Bible, and those advocates of christianity who must *meet these attacks*, that demand such an array of knowledge and skill. To the plain and honest mind, sincerely seeking for the path of duty and the way to heaven, the Bible is so plain and simple, that "he that runneth may read, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err."

I will conclude by urging upon you what I am

sure, with my present views, you will think, as a friend and a Christian, I am bound to urge. Will you now, without delay, enter upon those investigations that are to decide your eternal happiness, with the same energy and diligence that you give to your professional duties?

Let me suggest what it seems to me is the only fair and safe method for you to take.

It is a *practical* question. You are to act hereafter on the assumption, either that christianity is true, or that it is false. Of course you are to ascertain which of these positions has the *balance* of evidence in its favor; which has the most proof, and involves the fewest difficulties.

To do this properly you ought, in the first place, to secure all the *positive evidence* you can reach, *in favor* of christianity. Then seek all the difficulties and objections, and fairly investigate how far they are owing to ignorance on your part, and how far they are insuperable, unanswerable objections. This last demands much research, the aid of learned men, and many books, especially if you are determined that you will not allow the claims of the Bible till every possible difficulty of every kind is met and removed.

When this is done, *one half* is accomplished. Then take the other half, and first find out how much *positive evidence* you have that the Bible is *not* a divine authoritative revelation.

Then collect all the difficulties that occur on the supposition that the Bible is false. These are all

arranged under one of two necessary suppositions. For if the Bible is false, it was written by wicked men who intended to deceive, or by men who through ignorance, or misjudgment, or fanaticism, were duped themselves, and tried to dupe others. To judge of this matter fairly, read all the absurdities involved by *either* supposition, as you find them presented by the defenders of christianity, and above all, *read the Bible through*, and see what you can make of it, and how many difficulties you can find, on the supposition that the writers were either knaves or dupes.

When you have done all this, then, and not till then, you are fitted to decide whether you may take the dangerous side of a question on which eternity is suspended. And in forming a practical decision, you are bound to act on the maxims of safety and honesty which regulate your decisions in all other matters; you are bound to take the side which has the *balance of evidence* in its favor, and the one that *involves the least risk*.

If you refuse to take this course, from aversion, or indolence, or pride of opinion, or unwillingness to assume the duties that christianity urges, can you ever hereafter honestly maintain that the control of your belief is not in your power, or that you are an infidel because there is not evidence enough of the truth of christianity to secure your belief? Will you not go through life with the secret, ever recurring uneasiness of a guilty conscience, and the sad forebodings of evil to come, when your transitory days of probation are past?

Oh that you could but for one day, know the peace, the happiness, the blessed hopes from which you turn away, for then arguments would be needed no more !

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER VI.

(TO ANOTHER PERSON.)

MY DEAR SIR :

In regard to the subject of our late conversation, it seems to me your difficulties all resolve themselves into this short statement. "I have examined the evidences of christianity, and they do not produce conviction ; and if it *were* established as a divine revelation, there are thousands of opinions as to what it teaches, so that no one can tell which is right, while at the same time it contains some things so contrary to my reason that I cannot believe it."

In regard to the first part of the statement, that you have examined the evidences of christianity, and they do not produce conviction, I would say that it appears to me. that the great difficulty arises from a habit of thinking of christianity as a merely *speculative* question, where the thing involved is simply what you shall *believe*, and not what you shall *do* ; whereas in reality it is a *practical* question, where every man is necessarily obliged to

act either on the assumption that it is true, or that it is false. You look upon an effort to convince you of the truth of christianity, as you would upon an attempt to convince you of a certain theory in regard to the tides, or some geological theory, or any matter of mere speculation, where belief will make no difference with any of your feelings or actions. You just hold your mind in readiness to *receive evidence*, and are passively waiting to be convinced, just as if you had nothing else to do. But the case is very different. It is above all others, an immediately *practical* question, which involves the thoughts, feelings, and actions, of every day life, and where belief will modify our views of almost every duty. As I said in conversation, it is a case where you cannot help acting on the assumption that christianity is false, if you do not act as if it were true. For if christianity is true, then there is a future eternal existence for every human being, and our conduct in this transient scene decides our happiness forever, and every man is in danger of losing eternal happiness, and incurring endless suffering; and the *chief business* of life should be, to prepare ourselves and others for eternity, while all earthly plans, pursuits, and enjoyments, should be estimated in value, just in proportion as they promote or retard this main object.

If christianity be true, it alters the expediency and duty of a thousand practical matters. If it be true, it often would be wrong and unwise to take a course, which would be prudent and right were it false. For if christianity be false, and we know



of nothing beyond the grave, then we are bound simply to consult how we can secure for ourselves and others the most enjoyment in this life ; but if it be true, then we must make all our decisions turn on what is *safest*, in reference to the hazards of eternity. I have sometimes heard you say, that the course that Christians take is for their best interest and happiness, whether christianity be true or not. But this is a mistake. Look at our self denying friend P——. Do you suppose he is going to enjoy as much *in this world*, living, as he expects to do, a wanderer, without fame, without honor, without family ties, without the indulgence of his cultivated taste, with the prospect of a laborious, anxious life, and the probabilities of an early death, as he would if he believed, as you do, that all would be well in a future state for himself and others, and then should remain at home with his family, marry happily, seek fame and fortune, and that too with as fair a prospect as ever opened to a youthful aspirant ? No, my friend, you know that he looks beyond this world for his “recompense of reward,” and that, were it not for religion, as the apostle said, he would be “of all men most miserable.”

I do assure you that devoted and intelligent Christians do not take a course which would be wisest and happiest were there no future state. True it is that “godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that to come,” and all other things being equal, the pious man is far happier than any other man. But it is not because

he always takes the course that will secure him the most *temporal* enjoyment, nor because he secures what would be best and happiest were religion false ; but because in making sacrifices and subjecting himself to self denial and mental discipline, religion makes him a full compensation. Banish his hope for a future life, destroy his confidence in God, the sense of his superintending love and care, the gratitude that glows in his bosom and makes his labors light, and though he still is happier in a virtuous life than he would be if vicious, yet you change him to another man, and alter essentially his plans, and hopes, and efforts ; much that before seemed good would now become emptiness, and much that seemed evil would be called good.

You are a man acting on the assumption that christianity is false. For let it be made certain by the fullest evidence, that there were no God, no future existence, and no retributions after death, to you every thing would remain the same. It would not change a single iota in any of your plans. But to such a man as P—— every thing would be changed. All his present interests, efforts, and plans would be altered or relinquished, and so, to a greater or less extent, it would be with every sincere and consistent Christian.

Now when I urge you to become a Christian, I do not insist on the duty of seeing and feeling all the evidence that I see and feel. I do not insist that there are no difficulties to be met in religion, when they are to be met in every thing be-

side. I only claim, that on account of its paramount importance, you are bound to give to this subject more attention and interest than you give to any other; that before you decide against it, it is your duty to know *all* on this subject that is within your reach, on both sides, and then to determine which side has the greatest weight of evidence, and *act* consistently with that decision.

If christianity be true, then act to secure eternal life for yourself and others, as the first and all engrossing pursuit. If it be false, then act to secure all the good this life can give, without any reference to the future, and take as your motto, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The second part of the statement is, that were the Bible proved true, there are so many thousand opinions about what it contains, that no one can tell which is right. Much of this difficulty may be obviated by one consideration. The various opinions as to what the Bible teaches relate to a thousand different subjects; to matters of history, questions of morality, modes of interpretation, questions of church polity, questions as to the rites and ceremonies of the church, and a long list of other things about which men differ in opinion, and appeal to the Bible as umpire.

But when a man goes to the Bible to ascertain his own individual interests and duty, when he asks, "what am I *to do* to secure eternal blessedness?" the matter is narrowed down to a small point, and on this there are not such diversities of opinion, but rather remarkable unanimity. True,

there are diversities of opinion about many matters connected with it, and there are some things that are claimed to be equally safe and good, as substitutes for it; but those who receive the Bible as a revelation from God, all allow that, however many *other* things there may be, there is *one* thing that will secure eternal life. I state the proposition in this form.

*Any man who sincerely and habitually loves his Maker, so as to make it the chief object of interest and effort to discover his will and to obey it, will secure eternal happiness.*

Give this statement to the Espiscopalian, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Quaker, the Swedenborgian, the Unitarian, and every other Protestant sect I can think of, and they will unanimously yield their assent. Give it even to the Catholic, and though the dogmas of his infallible church forbid, he will evade the negative by his hopes of mercy for sins of ignorance that may be forgiven. It is true some think there is no great danger of losing eternal happiness, some urge that other things are of very great importance, some suppose that other things will suffice without this, but all agree that *this is taught by the Bible*, and that *this is safe*. Even the infidel who disallows divine revelation on the subject, joins in sustaining such a course as safest and best. Here, then, on the only point where I urge your attention and duty, what *you* must do to be safe and happy forever, there is one unanimous response, that the Bible teaches this one thing without doubt and without mistake. And no one ca-

vils but those who refuse to do this duty. All who do it find no difficulties on this point in the Bible.

In regard to the last difficulty, that the Bible teaches what is contrary to your reason, so that you cannot believe it, I would say that there seems to be great vagueness of conception on this matter of what is *contrary to reason*, in the minds of the great multitude who use the expression. Every body who finds any thing he does not like, or does not fully comprehend in the Bible, slides behind this covert, and declares he cannot believe it, because it is contrary to his reason. The Universalist cannot believe in eternal punishments, because it is contrary to his reason; the Unitarian cannot believe the Trinity, because it is contrary to his reason; the Socinian cannot believe in the existence of good and evil angels, because it is contrary to his reason; the Deist cannot believe in the miracles that attest christianity, because it is contrary to his reason; the Atheist cannot believe in a God and his superintending providence, because it is contrary to his reason.

I would just ask, then, what is meant by "being contrary to reason." So far as I have been able to ascertain, in many cases it means either "contrary to my preconceived notions," or else "contrary to my wishes."

But I suppose there is such a thing as reason, and that some things are contrary to it, and also that we ought not to receive as truth any thing that is thus contrary. Now you are a clear minded and honest man, and do not mean to maintain

that a thing is contrary to reason, simply because it is contrary to your wishes and preconceived opinions. You mean something else; will you allow me to try to find out what it is?

The facts of the case seem to be these. There are certain truths believed by all mankind, and adopted as maxims of practical conduct, and all the every day concerns of life are conducted on the mutual acknowledgment of the truth of these maxims.

For example, all the business of man with man, proceeds on the assumption of personal identity, so that we continue the same persons to-day that we were yesterday, and are accountable for past conduct. In like manner men assume that there is a material world around us, and that our senses may be trusted in learning its qualities. So also they assume that every effect has a cause, and that contrivances are proofs of an intelligent contriver. So also they assume that past experience is proof of what the future will be, so that what has been, will continue to be, unless there appears some cause for its destruction. So also they allow that human testimony is to be trusted, unless there is some assignable cause for distrust.

Belief in some of these maxims is called intuitive, or intuition, because it results from the very constitution of mind, while belief in other truths is the result of experience and observation. Now it is these maxims which are called the principles of reason, and whatever is contrary to them is said to be contrary to reason. And when we use the

term *reason* as expressive of a faculty, we refer to *that constitution of mind which involves confidence in these maxims, and the power of regulating our opinions and actions in conformity to them.* As a proof that this is the sense in which the word reason is used by mankind, we find that whenever a man believes or acts in opposition to these maxims, he is said to have "lost his reason." Thus if a man should believe himself to be one person one day, and another person the next day, or if he should disbelieve the existence of matter, and run into fire or water, as proof of his belief; or if a man acts on the supposition that the future will not correspond with past experience, and does not expect the rising of the sun, or the return of the seasons, in all such cases he is said to have lost his reason. So when any man advances a proposition that contradicts any of these truths, it is said to be contrary to reason.

It seems to me, then, that when you say that a thing is contrary to reason, you mean that it is contrary to those common maxims, which all men necessarily believe, and by which they regulate their opinions and conduct.

Now when I talk with you, you say you believe in a God, almighty in power, and infinite in wisdom and benevolence; that you believe in the immortality of the soul, and that our conduct and character here will have an influence on our future happiness; and these you say you believe because they are in agreement with your reason. Let us examine how they are in agreement

with reason. You believe in a God, because it agrees with that principle of reason that every effect must have a cause, and every contrivance an intelligent contriver. Paley's beautiful argument in his *Natural Theology*, is all founded on this acknowledged truth as the starting point.

You believe in the immortality of the soul, because it agrees with this principle of reason, that things continue to exist, unless there is a known cause for their destruction. Bishop Butler's argument on this subject, is founded on this principle, as the ground of his reasoning. He assumes that as the soul is existing at death, it continues to exist unless there is some assignable cause for its destruction. He shows that the event of the dissolution of the body is no such cause, and therefore that the soul does continue to exist after death.

You believe that future happiness in another state, is influenced by our conduct and character here, because it agrees with the principle of reason that past experience is evidence of what the future will be; and as in this life future happiness is affected by past conduct, so it is reasonable to suppose it will be hereafter. The argument in Butler's *Analogy* on this subject, is founded on this principle of reason. So far, then, your creed is in agreement with reason.

But you proceed to say, it is contrary to reason to believe that a being of almighty power, wisdom, and goodness, has created men to make them miserable forever, and as the Bible does teach the doctrine of eternal punishments, you



cannot receive its divine authority. Recollect that you have given up the Bible as having any claim to confidence, of course you are not at liberty to use those truths which rest solely upon its testimony. Now I wish to find out how you discover, without the Bible, that there is such a God as you claim. Reason teaches that there is a God, and that he is wonderful in wisdom, and mighty in power; but how do you get your evidence that this power and this wisdom is not *limited*, without going to that book for evidence which you have thrown aside? The works of nature prove that the Creator of the world can do most wonderful and astonishing acts of wisdom and power; but do they prove that there are not *some* things he *cannot* do?

I deny that you have any right to claim that there is a God, almighty in power, and infinite in wisdom, when you deny the authority of revelation, and I challenge you to bring me a single proof by the aid of reason and nature, to show that the wisdom and power of the Creator are not limited.

Now, in regard to the future destiny of man without revelation, we have nothing but past experience, from which to reason. We take then, the principle of reason, that past experience is evidence of what the future will be. What, then, does past experience teach us about the treatment to be expected in future, from our Creator.

Experience shows us that he is a Being, who made a race that is so guilty and miserable, that multitudes find it difficult to decide, whether there

is happiness enough to repay the suffering. Now, if he foreknew what he was doing, he voluntarily brought into existence all this evil ; if he did it without prescience, and involuntarily, he is a Being, liable to make dreadful evils, without intending it, and the evils now experienced, give fearful demonstrations of others, that may be still more terrific.

But we see that he does *some things voluntarily*, that are very strange and appalling, if we have no light from Revelation, to guide us. We find he is a being, that every day is bringing children into existence, and causing them to suffer acutely, and that, too, when in many cases no good is done by it, that any human eye can discover. Witness the sufferings of infants in heathen countries, where stupid, unfeeling parents cast them off, to die with the agonies of sickness and hunger.

We find, also, that he is a Being, that often inflicts punishment on the innocent, for the crimes of the guilty. Witness the children of the drunkard and licentious, who, had their parents been virtuous and temperate, would have been healthy and virtuous ; but who, by physical deterioration and bad example, receive the punishment of their parents' crimes.

We find, also, that he has so constituted things, that a single false step may plunge a young mind into hopeless and irretrievable ruin,—so that the happiness of a whole life, often turns on a single act.

These, by the Christian, are called the mysteries

of Providence, and faith, guided by Revelation, looks forward to a day, when all these things shall be shown to be consistent with almighty power and infinite wisdom and perfect benevolence.

But you, who are without the guidance of Revelation, what can you do, with the exhibitions of the character and administration of the Creator, as witnessed in the formation and perpetuation of such a state of things as we witness in this world? From what past observation or knowledge of his character and actions, do you infer that he has not created beings to make them miserable forever? Experience shows that he creates some beings, and subjects them to misery as long as you know any thing about them; that he makes innocent beings suffer, and for no good that you can discover; that he involves the innocent in punishment, for the crimes of the guilty; and that a single mistep of carelessness or ignorance, he allows to destroy the happiness of a whole existence in this world. Now, how do you reason from these data of experience, that he will not do other things, that to you seem cruel and inconsistent with wisdom and benevolence? Here is the place where I ask for information. Men who reject the Bible, always talk about the infinite wisdom and benevolence, and power of God, as if it were a conceded point, that they could gain this knowledge, without revelation, and then they fall to reasoning, as if they could by this position, destroy the claims of the Bible. But they are guilty of an

unfairness, of which, very probably they are unconscious. For they are not at liberty to take, what they can only gain, by allowing the authority of revelation, and then turn it, to destroy this authority. No man who denies revelation, has any right to say that there is a God of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, till he proves it by reason alone, nor any right to say, that a portion of the human race are not destined to future eternal misery, till he can show, that past experience has furnished him the data for such deductions.

I cannot understand how it is, that your mind can find any relief on this subject, by throwing aside christianity. Just look now at some of the deductions of reason and experience. We find that minds, constituted like ours, when brought together in this world, do act so as to destroy each others happiness. We see them torturing themselves with envy, malice, anger, and every baleful passion. We see them inflicting injury, injustice, and every evil, on each other. Oh what an awful picture of suffering, guilt, and madness, could your powerful pen portray, should you undertake to embody in language, only a little portion of what can be found, even within your own reach ! And yet, how much men are restrained, by the shortness of life, the fear of death, and the apprehensions of future retributions. When men's lives were lengthened to a thousand years only, the earth was so "filled with violence," that God was obliged to sweep them all away with the overwhelming flood.

Now, all that you can say about the future, is,

that men with these baleful habits and tendencies, are going into a state of existence that is to be immortal ; where these most powerful restraints on wickedness will cease. Do not say, that there *may be* stronger restraints in another world ; for you have no evidence without the Bible, that there are any, and it is folly to trust to what *may be* without any evidence, that *it is*. Would you send your fortune to a *may be* country, when you had no evidence of its existence ? Would you risk your fame on any assertion that has *no evidence* ?

Here then, is a race of such guilty beings as we find in this world, rushing into an endless state of existence, and without Revelation, we know of nothing that will restrain them from still more awful miseries and crimes.

To the Christian, religion comes in with its soothing hopes, and teaches us, that at least a part shall be saved ;—that multitudes, which no man can number, shall be redeemed, and exist forever, in peace, and virtue, and happiness. But you, sir, when you give up this anchor to the soul, on what do you rest your hopes ? What is there to save you from the sad forebodings, that good and bad, virtuous and vicious, are together rushing on to more terrific hazards, and more awful and universal ruin ? What good man, who feels his own frailties, the faltering of his most virtuous resolutions and efforts, the difficulties of shunning the temptations of this life, even when stimulated by the fears of death, and the sanctions of eternity, could bear up under the pressure of fears for a fu-

ture state, where existence is interminable, where all these restraints will be removed, and where new and more disastrous temptations may occur.

Indeed, my dear sir, while I feel the force of the strong language you selected from the Bible, to portray the future misery of those, who pass from probation, without forming the character that fits them for eternity ; while I shudder, as much as you do, at some of the truths of Revelation, I can find no comfort, no alleviation, in turning to the sad and terrific probabilities of reason. To me it would be only “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.”

But while Revelation shakes the soul with anxious and solemn forebodings, for all who go on in a course of sin, it opens the vision of an all wise, all powerful, and all merciful Being, who “hath seen the end from the beginning;” who “worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will;” who, “out of every evil, still educes good.” It presents such a being as Jesus Christ, so pure in rectitude, so tender in pity, so self-denying in benevolence, as Him, to whom all power in heaven and earth belongs ; as One, who knowing more, feeling more, and loving his creatures more than any human mind can do, has yet looked over the whole scene, and “rejoiced in spirit,” and bids all those who trust in him, to “rejoice evermore.” To Him our anxious and tempest-tossed spirits can repair, and under the shadow of his wings, can peacefully repose.

Strange that any man should ever feel tempt-

ed to give up revelation, which makes certain, so much happiness for himself, if he chooses to secure it, for multitudes whom he loves, and for so large a portion of his fellow men ; to resort for comfort to infidelity, that shrouds *all* in rayless, silent gloom.

Is not this tendency caused by that indolence, indifference, or aversion to religious obligation, which tempts men to turn from the *certainties* of revelation, which make their condemnation sure, if they continue in their chosen way, to infidelity, that gives them a chance to escape ?

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER VII.

MY DEAR SIR,

You have brought me now, fairly up to the Gordian knot of theology, both natural and revealed, *the existence of natural and moral evil*; but if I can neither untie nor cut it, I believe I can at least show, that in defending christianity, I have no more and no other difficulties, that you have in defending your views, and, therefore, that you have no reason for refusing assent to these doctrines of christianity, for objections which exist to a scheme you embrace and defend.

Your difficulty in briefer language, amounts to this. God is perfect in benevolence, and almighty in power, and the doctrine, that he has created beings, foreseeing that their whole existence would be miserable, is a direct contradiction, and cannot be believed; and a book that teaches contradictions, is not worthy of confidence, as a divine Revelation. Now, I will grant one part of your proposition, viz, a book that teaches contradictions, is not worthy of confidence, as a divine Revela-



tion. Those who defend the claims of revelation, necessarily assume, that there are principles of reason, which must stand as the criterion of judgment, and that nothing is to pass for truth, which contradicts these principles. All the vantage ground of christianity, rests on this foundation, that the truths it reveals, are sustained by such evidence of divine authority, and are so consistent with reason and common sense, that it is absurd to act on the assumption of their falsehood. Now, if we depend for all the authority of Revelation, on maintaining the supremacy of reason and common sense, in testing its claims, any acknowledgment, that these principles may be *sometimes* fallacious, is a virtual relinquishment of the divine authority of Revelation. It is giving up the very principles that sustain this authority. Therefore, if the Bible is found to contain contradictions, we are in this dilemma—we must allow, that in one case or the other, we may hold opinions at war with reason, and common sense. If the Bible is divine, and has these contradictions, and we must believe it, then we must believe absurdities, and if we may believe them in one case, we may in another, and so the argument, which proves, that denying the truth of Revelation involves absurdities, all goes for nothing. For we may as well believe one absurdity, as another. We, therefore, cannot allow, that there is even *one* absurdity and contradiction revealed, as an article of faith, without giving up the foundation on which christianity rests.

Your position assumes, that the Bible teaches,

that God foresees all things, is perfect in benevolence, and almighty in power ; that it also teaches, that he has created a race of beings, foreseeing that a large part of them will be forever miserable, and that these two doctrines are contradictions.

We cannot proceed safely, and advisedly, over this difficult ground of moral speculation, without some definitions, as to the fixed principles, or starting points. In the first place, we need to settle definitely, what a contradiction is. I define it *popularly* to be an assertion, which we cannot *even conceive* of, as being true, and therefore, cannot believe. For example, the assertion, that a thing exists, and does not exist, at the same time, we cannot conceive of as true, and therefore, cannot believe. The proposition, that a valley exists, without an adjoining hill ; or that a square is a circle, and is yet a square ; or that we can have the pleasure of rest from fatigue, when we have not been fatigued ; or that a being does all the good he can, and yet does not do some good, which is in his power ; all these are examples of contradictions, for they are impossibilities ; they are what we cannot conceive of as true, and cannot believe.

Now, if this is correct, then impossibilities cannot be presented, as *things to be done*, or as objects for the exercise of power. For power relates to what is an object of thought, as a thing to be done. There can, therefore, be no more propriety in asking, whether Deity has power to work a contradiction, than there is in asking, whether he has power to make a *yellow noise* or a *square per-*

*fume*. For it is as incongruous, and unmeaning, to speak of a contradiction as being done, or performed, as it is to speak of a noise as having color, or a smell as having shape. Whenever, therefore, two things are shown to be contradictory, the question never can be asked, as to whether Almighty Power can do both. Showing that such a contradiction exists, makes any such question incongruous, and absurd.

Now we have certain ideas connected with all the various expressions of language. A *square* brings to mind one idea; a *circle* brings to mind another idea; and these two ideas are contradictory. One cannot be conceived of as existing, and yet as being the other thing at the same time. So also there are certain words expressive of moral qualities, that are contradictory. A perfectly benevolent being is one that, whenever he has power to promote happiness without evil, always does it, and always promotes happiness to the full extent of his power. To say that a being having power to save from suffering and to confer happiness, is perfectly benevolent, and yet, in a case where there will be no consequent evil, but all good from doing thus, he does not and will not do it, is as much a contradiction as to say that a square is a circle. The assertion that a being has full power to save from misery and to make happy, in cases where no greater future evil would result from this course, and yet that he will not do it, is as entirely destructive to our idea of the term "perfect benevo-

lence," as saying that a thing is square, is inconsistent with the idea of its being round.

Acknowledging, then, that God is a being of perfect benevolence, is the same as saying that he saves from all the evil, and does all the good within his power. Of course it is the same as saying that all the evil that exists, it was either *entirely* out of his power to prevent, or else that by preventing it, he would cause the existence of greater evils. So that if we allow that there is a *perfectly benevolent* being, that made and controls all things, then we necessarily allow, that there will be the least evil and the most good, that he has the power to produce.

But natural and moral evil *actually do exist*. There is no disputing this point. The question then is, does this make it necessary to deny either the perfect benevolence, or the almighty power of God?

What do we mean by almighty power? We mean the power to do every thing to which power can be applied. We do not mean the power to work contradictions, for that is an incongruous idea. It is presenting a question as unintelligible, and inconceivable, and absurd, as whether there is such a thing as making a square perfume, or a yellow noise.

Now there is no Christian that I ever heard of who would allow that the system of divine economy was not *perfect*. All allow that God does the best that *he possibly can do*; of course that he *has not the power* to do any thing better than he has done. All agree in saying, that there is one

thing it is proper to say God has not the power to do, that is, the power to do more wisely, or more benevolently than he has done.

Of course we gain this position, that all the evil which ever did or ever will exist, came into existence under the government of a being who does good, and saves from evil to the full extent of his wisdom and power.

The question, then, is this ; Do the existence of natural and moral evil in the dominion of such a being, necessarily destroy our idea of his being almighty in power ? I answer no ; for almighty power refers always to what is possible in the nature of things, and has no reference to impossibilities, and it may be an impossibility that sensitive beings should exist without evil as an inevitable attendant. The existence of evil, and the perfect benevolence of an all wise and an almighty Creator have been the two warring propositions of moral speculations. The Atheist says they are contradictory, and so he gives up the idea of a Creator and Governor of the world. The Infidel says that they are not *now*, in this present world, inconsistent, but that their increased and *continued existence* through eternity would make them so ; and then he denies the authority of the revelation that teaches such a doctrine. While theological speculators, who receive the Bible, have been greatly disturbed by different theories that show *how* it is that these doctrines are not contradictory, they all allow that God is perfect in wisdom and benevolence, and of course that he saves from evil and promotes

happiness to the full extent of his power, so that he has no power to devise or to execute a better system than the one he administers. And then they have busied themselves with theories which show that God is almighty and perfectly benevolent, and yet will allow sin and suffering to exist forever. One class say that he foresaw that "sin was the necessary means of the greatest good," so that he had not, in the nature of things, the power to make so much happiness without sin and suffering, and voluntarily and willingly permitted its existence to secure this greatest amount of good; the other class say that the nature of things was such, that he could not make a system of free agency without having sin involved as an inevitable evil, just as friction is the inevitable evil attendant on machinery, and permitted it because he could not help it, without giving up a system which, on the whole, he saw would secure the greatest good with the least evil.

Many have deemed that the decision of the merits of these two theories, was of great importance. I never could perceive that it was so. It seems to me that all that is wanted is some means of showing that the existence of natural and moral evil is not necessarily contradictory to the doctrines of the benevolence and almighty power of God. Any theory that answers this purpose is a good one, for it takes away the main stay of Atheism and Infidelity; and a theory may be made to answer such an end. For no person can fairly claim that a doctrine is involved in difficulties when it can be

shown that there is a rational way by which they *may* be met, even if we cannot prove that the one suggested is *the* way. For instance, no man has a right to say that a piece of mechanism will not work on account of some embarrassment he perceives, when another person can show at least one way in which such a difficulty *may* be avoided, though he cannot affirm that it *is* thus avoided. It prevents the right of saying that there is no way in which the machine can work according to its design.

Now I think I can show one or two ways in which we can avoid the conclusion, that the existence of natural and moral evil are not contradictory to the doctrines of the almighty power, and perfect benevolence of God.

One theory is to say that there *may* be something in the very nature of free agency, such, that the existence of evil may be as necessary an attendant as friction in machinery. We see that the *fear of evil consequences from not doing*, is the mainspring of the activity of free agents, and it *may be* that this is as necessary a constituent of free agency, as a hill is a necessary attendant of a valley. And it may be that if no evil ever had existed, or did not continue to exist, it would be as impossible to awaken and sustain this fear, as it would be to obtain the pleasures of rest from fatigue, without being fatigued.

Or take another view of the subject. We find that a certain amount of good is deemed of such value, as that it is wise and benevolent to cause some pain to secure it. For instance, suppose it

were presented as an object of choice to a man, to become the father and husband of a virtuous and prosperous family, which still would be subject to the trials of occasional sickness and sufferings, just as the most virtuous and prosperous always must suffer some evils. The other alternative is, the non-existence of all this virtue and happiness, and the escape from the inevitable evils. Now every one feels that it would be benevolent and right to choose the first, even involving some attendant evil; and better than it would be to give up all the good, to prevent the necessary evil that would thus be called into existence. This example illustrates the general position, that a certain amount of good to be gained, makes it benevolent and right voluntarily to call some evil into existence. We have only to stretch our comprehension then, to an amount of good of similar *comparative value* in regard to the whole universe, to make it as wise and benevolent for God to call his infinite family into existence, as for a man to make such a choice as the one supposed. The only difficulty with us is, to conceive of any amount of good that would be sufficient to repay the evils of everlasting sin and suffering; but though we cannot do it, the infinite mind of Jehovah may perceive that the amount of evil in the universe will be as a drop to the ocean, compared with the good, and that in the nature of things there was as much a contradiction in making all this good without any evil, as there is in making a hill without a valley, or machinery without friction.



Now I do not say that this is in fact the right view of the matter, but I say that it is a theory which takes away the right of any infidel to assume that the existence of evil is contradictory to the doctrines of perfect benevolence and almighty power, as exhibited in the Bible.

God may be perfect in benevolence, and almighty in power, and there be such a constitution of things that the existence of natural and moral evil is as necessary and inevitable as His own existence. No Infidel or Atheist can show that it is *not* so, and therefore there is no ground for their assumption of contradictions in the doctrines of revelation.

I suppose you are already prepared for me to urge what I started with; namely, that the sentiments you hold and defend, involves the same difficulties as you say exist in the Bible. You hold to the existence of an almighty and benevolent Creator, and any explanation or theory which will make the existence of all the evils to be found in *this* world consistent with this character, will as readily make the doctrine of the *eternal* existence of sin and suffering thus consistent. Do you say that in a future state there will be some *compensations* for the sufferings and evils of this? You then allow the principle that a certain amount of good can more than compensate for a certain amount of evil, so as to make it just and benevolent to allow this evil to exist. This principle may be just as readily used to make the existence of perpetual evil just and benevolent; it only needs to increase

the ratio of the good secured, as the evil allowed to exist becomes greater.

Now, my dear sir, there is no one but the Atheist who escapes the difficulties supposed to be involved by the existence of evil in the government of a benevolent and almighty being; and those who deny revelation, or the eternity of future punishments, have as much difficulty on this ground as those who allow them.

For myself, as soon as I grant that there is a Creator of perfect benevolence, I am satisfied that there is, and will be, as little evil and as much good as is *possible* in the nature of things, and what that nature of things *is*, that makes it impossible to have a better system than the one existing, I leave to the wisdom of any theologians who can see farther into these matters than I can, and who more realize their importance than I ever could do. I am sure it would be better to have *all the good* that ever has or ever will exist, and *none of the evil*, than to have the *same amount* of good with such dreadful evils intermixed. Why it *cannot* be, I do not believe any one in this world will ever discover, nor do I suppose any great good will come from contending about who has a theory the nearest right, on this subject, for it is what can never be settled.

One thing, however, I will allow, and that is, that though we may never give up revelation, because we cannot see how certain doctrines can be made consistent, we should be justified in giving it up, could we show that it did contain doctrines that

were inconsistent, or were contrary to reason and common sense, or contrary to that moral feeling that makes us hate injustice, and duplicity, and deceit. If any person could prove that God *professed* to desire the salvation of *all* his creatures, and yet in fact really wished that some should sin, as the means of promoting the greatest good, it would be a case where infidels would have a right to reject the Bible as a book teaching sentiments contradictory to the moral nature God has given us. For it would teach that God pretended to wish the holiness and happiness of all his creatures, when in fact he did not desire it, and this is falsehood and deceit. You can easily perceive the difference between seeing that a certain doctrine is wrong, and opposed to our implanted moral feelings, and a doctrine which is so far beyond our reach, that though we cannot explain the consistency of it, we are as much unable to prove its inconsistency.

If we cannot show how the existence of evil is consistent with perfect benevolence and almighty power, no one can show that it is inconsistent. But we can perceive how it is deceitful and wrong to pretend to desire the salvation of all, when in fact it is desired that a part shall sin and suffer forever.

If God may with propriety and rectitude deceive us in one thing, he may be deceiving us in all, and allowing this, destroys all confidence in his revelation.

If any person, therefore, charges me with holding doctrines that make it necessary to adopt any

such theory as this, to make them consistent, I say *prove it*, and I relinquish them. I do not believe the Bible teaches any doctrines that can be shown as consistent, only by allowing that our Creator declares what is false to be true, and if you can find any such doctrines in the Bible, or show any case where the Bible teaches that God declares any thing to be true which is false, according to the fair and correct interpretation of language, you destroy my respect for the Bible, and my faith in its doctrines. But I claim that neither you or any man is able to do this, and that every infidel that has tried it, has found that it was his own ignorance, and not the Bible that was at fault.

Here I will leave the whole matter, with the sincere desire and prayer that you may use your reason and common sense in matters of religion, the same as you do in all other matters ; for then I am sure you will be happier in this world, and safe and happy forever.

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER VIII.

(TO ANOTHER PERSON.)

MY DEAR SIR,

In *conversing* with you on religious topics, it seems to me, we make very little progress in enlightening each other, for want of some method of avoiding those incessant episodes of conversation, that are caused by misconceptions, as to the terms used, or by the introduction of incidental matters, that divert from the main topic of debate. I am now going to try my *pen*, relying on your oft repeated assurance, that the subject is one deeply interesting to you, and on your permission to communicate with you upon it, as frequently, and as freely as I choose.

Will you have patience with me, when I tell you, that, so far as your best interests are concerned, it seems to me you hold a position, not a whit in advance of the avowed infidel, while in some respects, it is more disadvantageous.

You profess to be a believer in christianity, to reverence its ordinances; you give your influence, and your money, to support its institutions, and

you regularly attend upon its ministrations. By this course, you do indeed gain some advantage over the infidel. Your influence and example in society are better, you are not committed against religion, you listen to its instructions, and you have fewer repellencies to be overcome, than the avowed opposer, who avoids its services, and oppugns its doctrines.

But when I approach you as a believer in the Bible, and urge the duty of your becoming immediately, a decidedly religious man; when I present, as a motive, the danger of eternal ruin in your present course, you begin to talk about narrow views, that confine all hope of salvation, to a certain track; and then, when I appeal for authority, to the Bible, you evade by such sort of remarks as these; that you doubt if the passages I cite, have exactly the meaning I give them, that others put a different construction upon them, that my views seem unreasonable to you, and you doubt if the Bible sanctions them, that there is a great variety of opinions about these matters, and that while good men of equal talents, learning, and piety, differ as to what the Bible teaches, no one is at liberty to say that he is right, and that all who differ from him are wrong; that you believe that charity in judging of others, is the prime Christian virtue; and that you think I shall find many people in heaven, whom my present exclusive way of thinking would shut out.

The amount seems to be this. There is no knowing what the Bible teaches—one is as likely

to be right as another,—let every man think what he pleases, about what it contains, and only maintain a charity, which allows that each one may be right, and if not right, may as certainly get to heaven, as if he were.

Now I wish to ask, why, in effect, this is not denying the authority of the Bible, just as much as the open infidel denies it. A *revelation* from God, is a communication from Him that *makes known* his will. The infidel says God has never made any such revelation; you say he has made such a communication, and that nobody can know what it teaches. Now wherein is your position any better than that of the infidel? He denies the existence of a revelation, and you deny the intelligibility of its contents, and on those very points, too, for which it is most needed; the future, eternal safety of our race. If a man is dying for want of proper remedies for his disease, which is the best, to have a physician leave him without any prescription, or to write one, so that no person can know, whether he gets the right ingredients, or deadly poisons?

The infidel has this advantage over you. He takes wittingly, the responsibility of denying the authority of divine revelation, and meets every argument for christianity fairly, front to front, and thus truth has a fair chance at his mind. But you bow reverently to the authority of divine revelation, range yourself with its defenders, and then slip behind all its flashing bolts, in a position, which, so far as your own safety is concern-

ed, is more dangerous and disadvantageous, than that of avowed infidelity.

The position I wish to urge then, is this, that the Bible is not only a revelation from God, designed to teach men the way of safety and happiness for eternity, but that it is so written, that every man can discover this way, and *know* that he is right, and that all who differ from him are wrong.

But do not misunderstand me here. I do not say so much in relation to all the thousand matters that divide Christians into sects; for questions of church government, and christian rites, and philosophical speculations, and most other matters, about which Christians contend, are of altogether minor importance. I speak simply, with reference to the great question, in which the best, and eternal interests of every one of our race is individually involved, *the method by which we are to secure future happiness after death.* This is the point, where I claim that every man can *know* what the Bible teaches, and know that all who differ from him are wrong.

When we speak of knowing what the Bible teaches on this point, and of being sure that we are right, and that all who differ are wrong, we are to be understood, as we are in using such language about all other matters. What do we mean, when we say, that we know that a man of heretofore strict integrity, will not lie in a certain case; or when we say, we know a certain event has transpired, when we have the testimony of a cred-



ible eye witness ; or when we say we know that there will be worship in a certain church, on a coming Sabbath, where worship always has been attended ? We simply mean, that there is so much evidence in favor of these assertions, that it would be folly to act as if they were not true, although it is possible, that the honest man may waver in untried temptation, or the credible eye witness may have somehow been deceived, or some accident may prevent worship, at the customary time and place.

I claim, therefore, that we can know what the Bible teaches, in regard to the way of future happiness, and the evils of neglecting this way, just as much as we can know anything. We can find so much evidence for the safety of one way, and so little evidence to counter-balance it, that it would be the extreme of folly, to act on a contrary supposition.

In examining all the systems of religion that have ever existed, we find their requisitions to be of two general classes, either demanding a certain *character* of mankind, or else, exacting certain positive *external performances*, irrespective of character. Among the heathen, character has not been demanded, as the preparation for future safety and happiness. The demands of their religion have been sacrifices, rites, ablutions, tortures and ceremonies. Among Mahometans, prayers, outward acknowledgments, abstinence from certain indulgences, and other forms of outward service, are the appointed methods of securing eternal hap-

piness. With a large part of the Romish church, acts of self-denial, penances, and compliance with certain forms, that constitute a union with the mother church, are deemed the mode of securing eternal life.

But with most protestants, who profess to receive the Bible as the only rule of faith and practise, *character* is supposed to be that which decides the condition of mankind after death. Between you and me there is no difference on this point ; the only question is, *what* character is it, which the Bible decides to be the indispensable pre-requisite to eternal life.

Before appealing to the Bible, it will aid in the inquiry, to ascertain definitely, *what it is, that constitutes human character*. Of course the inquiry relates to what pertains to moral character, or that which is the subject of praise and blame, reward and punishment. Intellectual and physical characteristics, therefore, are left out of consideration.

It may be well first, to notice some things that are *not* regarded, in forming estimates of character. Among these may be mentioned mere external actions, without regard to the motives. It is true, that in many cases, motives can be learned, only by external actions. But men can, and do, arrive in process of time, to the motives that influence actions, and it is these motives, that determine the nature of actions and character. For example, a man may be seen often giving to relieve the wants of the suffering. It may be, that there is no opportunity afforded of learning the motives that

influence him, and in such cases, Christian charity demands that these be considered as benevolent actions. But a course of long observation, may at last decide, that the man is habitually penurious and cold hearted, and that in all the instances in which he appears liberal and charitable, it is done, merely as a matter of ostentation, to gain the praise of eye witnesses. As soon as the evidence of this is clear, the actions alone are not presented, as proof of the man's character ; his motives are taken into consideration, and his character is determined by them. It may then be stated as a general fact, that men do not seek for mere external actions, as the evidence upon which to form their estimates of character, but always take into consideration, so far as they can be learned, the motives from which these actions spring.

Another particular which is *not* taken into account, in forming estimates of character, is the *relative proportion* of good and bad actions. If one man violates truth, once in a hundred times, and speaks the truth the remaining ninety-nine times, and another man violates it once in ten times, and regards the truth the remaining nine times, we do not find, that men would call one ten times more veracious than the other. So also, if a man cheats once in a given number, and is honest in all other cases, the proportion of honest and dishonest acts, is not brought into consideration, in determining his character. A single deliberate falsehood, or a single act of dishonesty, will sometimes so fix a

man's character, that no amount of past good actions of a contrary character, will alter this decision. Mankind in forming estimates of character, never keep any such accounts of debt and credit, or regulate their respect and esteem, by the proportionate number of times in which the good exceeds the evil.

But the following are the particulars, which are always objects of regard, in judging of human character among mankind. First, *natural disposition, and constitutional peculiarities.*

There can be no doubt as to the fact, that men are differently endowed, as it respects constitutional traits. Some are naturally gentle and placid, others are irritable and petulant. Some are pliant and volatile, others are obstinate and persevering. Some are naturally full of generous impulses, others are phlegmatic and cold hearted. Some are serious, quiet and contemplative, others are full of spirits, and have a strong love of humor and merriment. Some are naturally sympathetic and benevolent, others are hard hearted and selfish. Some have a natural tendency to concealment and art, others are naturally frank and sincere. However much influence may be ascribed to circumstances and education, in exciting, or modifying these peculiarities, none will deny, that at least a portion of them, are owing to the original mental constitution. In estimating a man's character, these peculiarities always come into consideration. In describing a character, we say, such a man is

“naturally very amiable,” or he is “constitutionally irritable and passionate,” and various other expressions of this kind. Whatever theories men may have on this subject, they universally talk, and feel, and act, on this assumption of constitutional differences.

Another test of character is *a man's moral principles in resisting temptation, as learned by experience and testimony.*

A man, who, in all the ordinary circumstances of trial, habitually speaks the truth, is called a man of veracity. A man who uniformly is just, and fair in all his dealings, is called an honest man. A man who habitually regulates his appetites by the rules of temperance is called a temperate man. And thus, with other duties. There is no estimate made, of the number of times in which a man fails, compared with the number of times in which he succeeds, in following the rules of duty, but the inquiry is, whether he has a force of principle and habit, that enables him to maintain a consistent course, in certain duties, so that in these respects, he may be expected in all cases, to meet and overcome the ordinary temptations of life.

The strength of a man's moral principles is tested, by the *amount of temptation* which experience proves he can withstand. If, with only the ordinary temptations to falsehood and dishonesty, a man is found to falter, he is regarded as one, whose principles are so weak that he cannot be trusted. And sometimes a single instance of a

flagrant kind, may fix his character through a whole community. There are cases, however, in which a single act, may not be regarded as the index of a man's character. If a person through a course of years, has shown himself habitually honest and veracious, in all the ordinary temptations of life, and is brought into sudden and uncommonly powerful temptation, his failure in such a trial, will not entirely vacate past established character. He will still be regarded as one, who has principle enough to resist all ordinary temptation, but not as one, whose principles are strong enough to meet unusual and great temptations. On the contrary, a man who passes unusual and great trials, with unfaltering rectitude, is regarded as a person of high moral principle, and the strength of his principles is estimated by the amount of temptation, which experience shows he can encounter and overcome.

It thus appears, that in judging of the strength, or excellence of a man's principles, mankind estimate them, not by the proportionate number of good and evil actions they observe, but by the uniformity of adherence to the rules of rectitude, and by the amount of temptation, which experience shows can be resisted and overcome.

But it will be found that men gain a character for strength of moral principle in one respect, while in other particulars they are deficient. For instance, some are regarded as men of honor and honesty who are intemperate. Others are strictly

temperate who are dishonest. Some are persons whose word may be implicitly trusted, who were never known to lie or deceive, and yet are extravagant and licentious. Some are strict in integrity in all business matters, and violate their domestic duties. Character is judged of then, not only by the strength of a man's principles, but by the *number of particulars* in which he habitually regulates his conduct by the rules of rectitude.

Another thing which is considered in estimating character is the *nature of a man's principles*, or his *intellectual views of what is right and wrong*.

Mankind vary in their notions of rectitude and duty. What one man regards as right, another thinks is wrong. What some esteem paramount duties, others set aside as useless or evil. There are some duties so very clear and obvious, such for instance as the obligations of honesty and veracity, that men generally agree respecting them, for all men can readily perceive that society cannot exist except by enforcing these duties. But on almost all questions of duty, there are diversities of opinion, as well as diversities of practice. Of course in judging of a man's character some reference is always had to his own notions of right and wrong. If a man is brought up to believe that the Sabbath is not a consecrated day, as some religious sects maintain, his violation of what others deem duties in regard to it, is very differently estimated, from what it would be, did he violate his own principles. When a man is found guilty of a violation of some

duty, it is always esteemed a palliation, if it be shown that his education or his principles led him to regard the act as lawful and right. Though believing an action to be right does not make it so, yet a voluntary sacrifice of conscience and acknowledged duty, is regarded very differently from the aberrations occasioned by false principles. Men, therefore, always modify their views of a man's character by his particular notions of duty. They find out what his principles are, and how strictly he conforms to them, and then form their estimate.

The last thing to be mentioned as entering into our estimate of human character, is the *predominant interest or ruling passion of the mind*, or what metaphysicians would call the *governing purpose*.

Some men it will be found are devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, so that the gratifications of sense are chiefly sought, and all other pursuits are subordinate. Others are supremely devoted to amassing wealth; others are as eager in the pursuit of power; others are seeking fame and honor as the engrossing object; others are devoted to projects for promoting human happiness; and others are devoted to the love and service of their Maker. According as one or the other of these objects obtain the control of the mind, men are denominated sensual, or avaricious, or ambitious, or benevolent, or pious. That the human mind is often under the supreme control of some ruling passion no one will deny. That the desire of pow-



er and human estimation was the ruling passion of Bonaparte, that the desire of promoting human happiness was the ruling passion of Howard, that some are often absorbed by affection to a beloved object, that others are slaves to a desire for wealth and distinction, none who have read the history of mankind and mingled with the world can deny.

The peculiarity of such a controlling principle is, that it takes the lead of all other interests, so that any thing else which comes in competition, eventually yields. There may be seasons when other objects occupy the mind, and opposing interests may sometimes seem for a while to gain the ascendancy, but in the final result the dominant passion will always be found to maintain its superior control. The ambitious man may sometimes yield for a season to the dictates of conscience or the calls of affection, the avaricious man may sometimes yield to the claims of pity, the man of pleasure may for a time engage in more elevated pursuits, but the final bent and current of interest and effort will eventually follow the real governing purpose of the mind.

Very frequently this controlling interest is determined by the natural constitutional tendencies, but it is as often found to be the result of circumstances, or of education, or of voluntary efforts at self government. Some minds seem destitute of any such particular leading principle. They seem to have their interests and efforts regulated more by circumstances than by any peculiarity of char-

acter, sometimes being engrossed by one interest, and sometimes by another, and never manifesting any controlling tendency of mind. And yet it will be found that such minds, often by circumstances or by voluntary efforts, acquire such a controlling principle. For example, a child grows up without exhibiting any particular tendency of this kind. He is interested in whatever chances to be presented to his attention. But he is thrown into a circle in which the desire for military glory is awakened and stimulated; it is constantly increased by certain influences, until at last it becomes the all-absorbing passion for life.

But the most interesting fact in relation to this peculiarity is, that the master passion of the mind is *susceptible of change*, and that this change may be produced, *by the voluntary efforts of the individual himself*.

An example of this kind is recorded as authentic by, Foster, in his *Essays*. A young man of fortune, through his early career was engrossed by the pursuit of pleasure, until in supplying the gratifications of sense, his estate was squandered and himself reduced to beggary. One day as he was standing on an eminence overlooking his lost estate, he formed a sudden and firm determination to regain it. He commenced a life of labor and strict economy, and persevered in his course until avarice became his ruling passion, and he died a wealthy miser. Here a single momentary determination, followed up by corresponding action

changed entirely and for life, the whole current of his wishes, hopes, plans, and thoughts. He was transformed from a reckless, thoughtless spend-thrift, to a calculating, industrious miser. Such sudden and entire changes of character, though not perhaps as marked, I have witnessed repeatedly in my own limited sphere of observation, and you probably have known such cases yourself.

It will not, I presume, be disputed by any one, that the ruling passion of the mind is one of the ingredients that is taken into consideration in estimating character.

These four particulars, I believe, include all that is ever regarded as constituting moral character, viz: constitutional peculiarities; the strength and extent of principles as learned by experience; the nature of a man's principles, or his intellectual views of what is right and wrong; and the leading interest or governing purpose of the mind. *Habits* refer to the ease or difficulty of any course of feeling or action, caused by repetition, and of course are included in the above particulars.

I do not wish to proceed any farther till it appears whether we agree so far. The question under consideration is, what is that character which is revealed as indispensable to future eternal happiness? As a preliminary, we must first determine what it is that is regarded as constituting human character, in order to learn what it is that can be made the subject of divine legislation. Will you

examine what I have written, and see if there is anything included in human character that could be made the subject of legislation, which I have not herein specified and described.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER IX.

MY DEAR SIR,

It seems we agree that character is that which is to decide our destiny after death, and that the particulars I have specified, include all that ever are regarded in forming an estimate of character among mankind, and all that can be made a subject of divine legislation.

We approach then to the point for which we started,—does the Bible decide what character is indispensable to future safety, so clearly that we can *know* that we are right, and that all who differ from us are wrong?

Before appealing to the Bible, it is necessary to bear in mind one important distinction, and that is, the difference between what is revealed as a *rule of duty*, and what is revealed as the *indispensable pre-requisite to eternal safety and happiness*.

We find the Bible contains strict and universal rules on all points of moral and religious duty. The world is filled with the jarring opinions of short-sighted men, as to what is right and what is wrong,

and amid them all, the Bible comes forward with its clear and unerring rules of rectitude, and strictly forbids every sin, and enjoins every moral and religious duty. But the question as to what God decides to be right and enjoins, and what he declares to be wrong and forbids, is a very different question from the one which inquires the method of securing eternal happiness. No human being ever did or ever will, fulfil all the duties enjoined in the Bible, and no one could ever hope to secure future safety by such a measure of conformity. Perfect, invariable, universal conformity to all the rules of duty recorded in the Bible, every man can *know* is not the condition of eternal life.

But the Bible does teach that there is a method of gaining endless happiness, and we agree that a *certain character*, is made the indispensable condition.

Character, it has been allowed is not determined by simple external actions without regard to the motives, nor by any *relative proportion* of good deeds when compared with the evil. But it is made up and judged of, by constitutional peculiarities, by the strength and extent of moral principles, by the intellectual views of right and wrong, and by the leading interest or governing purpose of the mind.

To which then of these four particulars does divine legislation refer, in teaching us how to gain eternal life? Will you take the Bible and examine for yourself? In the first place, does it teach

that any particular trait or combination of traits, in the original mental constitution is made the term of salvation? Is it any where taught that a man must have a naturally amiable disposition, or a calm temperament, or a pliant disposition, or anything which depends solely upon the original formation of the mind, and for which we are no more responsible, (except for its proper regulation,) than we are for the color of the eyes or the hair. I think you will allow that we may *know* that no such terms of eternal safety are proposed in the Bible.

The next thing which is included in character is the strength of a man's principles, and the number of particulars in which he manifests strength of moral principle. Here is the place where difficulties are most likely to occur, and it may not be inexpedient again to bring to mind, that the question is not, what are the moral duties which the Bible enjoins, nor what it is that constitutes a person just and honest and veracious, nor what is necessary to make a man a good husband, father, or citizen, nor what entitles him to be called benevolent and virtuous in the common acceptance of those terms. But the question is, what is it in character, which is revealed as the indispensable pre-requisite to our eternal well-being, so that if we secure it we are safe, and if we fail we are lost forever.

I here take it for granted that you do not question the fact that the Bible teaches that some of our race are to be forever happy, and others to be

forever miserable in the future state, and that our inquiry is restricted simply to the terms of safety and happiness.

Now on this matter there must be something exact and specific, or else it amounts to nothing. If our eternal safety depends upon a certain strength of principle in resisting temptation, or on the particular number of duties in which we attain a certain strength of principle, then we must know *what this amount is*, or the way of safety is not made known. For if no person is saved by universal and perfect obedience, and some are lost forever, for not reaching the required point which is short of perfection, then the *place of safety* must be revealed, or we know nothing to any purpose.

If a physician prescribed a remedy, the efficacy of which depended on taking not the whole, but a certain part, and if taking less than the part demanded, was certain death, what should we say of a prescription directing the ingredients, and neglecting to state the quantity to be taken? In like manner, if perfect virtue is not the term of salvation, and yet a certain number of wicked actions will ruin the soul forever, we are entirely without the means of safety, unless we are told where is the point of excellence which we must attain in order to be safe. So that unless the Bible teaches how far we may come short of universal obedience, and yet be safe, then the strength of a man's principles, and the number of duties in which he exhibits such strength of principle, are not the sub-



jects of legislation in directing how to obtain eternal life.

Will you examine the Bible on this point, and tell me if there is a single passage in which we are taught how far we may fall short of perfect obedience, and in how many respects we must have strict, unwavering strength of principle, in order to secure eternal life? Does the Bible teach that if a man can resist a certain amount of temptation, in so many given particulars, he shall be saved, and if he fall short he shall be lost?

We are commanded in the Bible to "be perfect, even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect;" we have the rules of duty in all their full extent and minutiae, and I have never yet met an exception, where we are told that any thing less than perfection in each and all particulars is required.

Will you examine the Bible then and see if you cannot say that you can *know*, (as certainly as you know any thing on which the practical questions of this life turn,) that the Bible does not point out either perfection of moral principles and practice, or any definite given amount that is *short* of perfection, as the terms of eternal life? If you allow this, then it is not this ingredient of human character which is made the subject of legislation, in directing mankind as to what they must do to be saved.

Take then the next item that enters into the estimate of human character, a man's intellectual views of duty, or his particular notions as to what

is right and wrong. Is it any where taught, that perfect accuracy and consistency in this matter is the indispensable means of future safety ; or, if this is not required, is any *limited* amount of correctness and accuracy in this particular, indispensable to salvation ? I think you will readily allow that we can *know*, that these are not the terms of future safety.

The only point of character that now remains, is the leading desire or governing purpose of mind. Of course, if there is *any thing* that pertains to moral character which is the subject of divine legislation, in reference to our future well being, it must be this, unless there has been some mistake, either in determining what it is that constitutes human character, or else in the investigation which shut out all the other particulars.

Now, before referring to the Bible, let us inquire for a moment what would seem most rational and probable, from what we know of mind and its powers and tendencies, on the supposition that God is such a being as the Bible represents him, wise, benevolent, and just. We should, in the first place, expect him to demand nothing but what is in the power of all to perform. This is necessary to consistency with both his justice and benevolence.

Next, we should suppose he would require that which would be most likely to promote harmony, unity of action, benevolence, equity, and happiness in his universal family.

We find the constitution of mind to be such, that every being is intimately connected with other beings, so that no one can act independently for his own wishes and interests, without invading the happiness of others.

We find also that the interests and wishes of one mind constantly clash with those of another, so that one mind is continually under the necessity either of giving up its own plans and desires, or of securing them by demanding such a sacrifice from others. Children have to give up to each other in the nursery—pupils in the school room—men of business in the mart of competition—aspirants for fame—combatants for power; even the pursuit of benevolent enterprises involves clashing plans and opposing views of what is right and best.

In a family on earth, we find that strong affection towards parents who are wise and good, and the submission of the will of the children to them, is the sure and only method of securing harmony, love, and unity of action; nor can we, when clashing interests meet, devise any other method of safety but to secure some controlling mind, that all the rest shall so love or fear as to yield to its superior wisdom and power.

From all then, that we know of mind and its relations, by observation and experience, we should say that in the great universe of mind, the most rational and probable method of securing harmony and benevolent feelings and actions, would be to have all minds so united to the great Creator and

Father of all, as that conformity to his wishes shall be the leading desire of all ; while on his part, he shall disclose all those rules of feeling and action which his perfect wisdom and benevolence, perceives to be for the best interests of the whole. We all know how easy, how delightful it is to give up our wishes and plans to an object of endeared affection. It often happens here on earth, that minds are so closely united in affection, that it is pleasanter to secure the wishes of the being loved than to accomplish our own.

If it were possible, then, to inspire such affection in all dependent minds for the Creator, that his will would be the will of all, and the desire to please Him, the ruling passion of all minds, every occasion for clashing, and collision, would cease, and the whole universe would be united in harmony of feeling and action.

Look, now, into the Bible and see what is the character of those who are described as the heirs of heaven. Look at the characters of Abraham, David, Peter, John, and Paul. Read their writings and tell me what appears to be their ruling passion, their first interest, their controlling purpose. We do not find that their constitutional traits were changed. We do not find that their intellectual views of right and wrong were all strictly correct, for we find cases in which they strongly differed in opinion. We do not find that they were free from great faults. We do not find they were saved because they attained a certain strength of principle, in a certain number of particulars, in performing moral duties,

Look, then, at the instructions of our Savior. "No man can serve two masters"—"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon"—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." I will not go into farther particulars. I only ask you to examine for yourself, and see if you cannot decide to your own satisfaction, that when a man gives up pursuing the enjoyments of this world as his chief good, and devotes his heart to the love and service of God, that he will be saved through the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, so that with *imperfect* obedience he can be accepted, and made happy forever.

I leave the matter here to your own investigation and reflection.

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER X.

MY DEAR SIR,

I thank you for the candid acknowledgment that the views I present seem more rational and consistent than you expected, and I feel still more gratified by the indication your letter affords that you have bestowed so much serious attention on the subject, and have so faithfully examined the “only sure word of testimony” to learn for yourself what it teaches.

Whatever confidence I may feel in the correctness of my own views, my hope of securing similar views on your part, and the happy results which flow from them, rests not so much on my ability to advocate and explain, as on the light and power of truth which *the Bible* contains, and which a daily, *candid* and *prayerful* study of it will secure. This is what I would urge upon you as reasonable, consistent, dignified, and a most solemn obligation. For what is more reasonable than that such erring and dependent beings as we are, should seek to know whether we *have* a guide from our **Maker** and *what*

its instructions are. What is more consistent with the character of an intelligent and enlightened intellect? What is more dignified or more obligatory? And while, as creatures of a day, we are forming our characters and deciding our interests for eternity, what more appropriate, rational, and sacred a duty than to supplicate the aid and guidance of the Father of our spirits, who is the source of light and truth, and who promises to guide into all truth those that thus seek his aid.

I will now attempt, as you request, to give you my views on the points you present as matters of difficulty.

In regard to the first, the very great *variety* of requisitions you find in the Bible as terms of salvation, and many of them diverse in their character. You say you took the New Testament and began with the teachings of the Savior, and found it to consist of precepts inculcating meekness, mercy, pureness, forgiveness to enemies, chastity, unostentatious alms-giving, prayer, and most of the important and difficult moral duties toward our fellow men, and concluding with the declaration that he that heareth and *doeth* these things shall be saved, and that he that *doeth* them not shall perish. You then read of the day of judgment, and find men acquitted or condemned for their good or evil *actions*.

You find that we are in many passages expressly told we shall be judged, at the last day, for our *words and deeds*. Then, again, we are told that to see the kingdom of heaven we "must be born

again ;” then to “repent and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out ;” then we are told that “without *faith* it is impossible to please God ;” then, again, “without *holiness* no man shall see the Lord ;” then, again, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Then “repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” are enjoined ; then we are required to “repent and be *baptized* ;” and in addition to what the Bible urges, you add the forms of expression used by ministers of religion, such as to “come to Christ,” to “submit to God,” and other such expressions.

I know of no view of the subject but the one I deem the right one, that reconciles all these different modes of expression, so as to make them consistent. The following will exhibit how, on the view I here present, they all may be readily made consistent and harmonious.

A distinction that I have pointed out, very speedily obviates many difficulties ; and that is, between what is demanded as *indispensable to salvation*, and what is required as *a duty*. This distinction, with the common sense mode of interpreting language, makes the matter very plain to me.

I will first give an illustration of the common sense use and interpretation of language that will best illustrate my idea.

A son has become disobedient and rebellious, refuses to submit to the rules of the family, dislikes his father for the restraint imposed, distrusts his



judgment, questions his rectitude, and the wisdom and propriety of his family regulations ; he finally forsakes his home, becomes reckless and abandoned, is indolent, ill tempered, licentious, profane, and the follower of every evil way ; an object of universal contempt, pity, and reprehension.

At last he comes under good influences, sees, and properly feels the folly of his course, makes up his mind to return to his home and submit himself to the laws and authority of his father, sees the folly and wickedness of his past course, laments his ingratitude, and the injury done to his father, feels the propriety, wisdom, and goodness of his regulations, comes home, is forgiven, and commences a course of virtuous industry, and obedience to all family regulations. Some of his bad habits yet cling to him, but he strives against them, and is constantly gaining in the power of self control.

Now in speaking of such a son, and of his change, all these expressions would be used to indicate the same thing. “He is become a new man ;” “he is a new creature ;” “he has repented and returned ;” “he has submitted to his father ;” “he has become an obedient son ;” he has “turned from the evil of his ways ;” or, to use the scripture term, meaning the same thing, he is “*converted*.” He now has confidence, (or *faith*,) in his father ; he now “*believes* in what his father said ;” “his *actions* are proof of his repentance ;” “by *his works* he shows what he feels and believes ;” “he is forgiven and treated like a good man,” (that is, he is *justified* by

faith evinced by his works, or he is treated like a just man,) he is “justified by faith, and justified by works, which are the fruits of faith;” “he is saved from ruin;” “he has escaped condemnation,” and similar expressions.

Now the question might here arise, what is it for which he is forgiven and justified? Is it for his good works? Is it for his good feelings? Is it for his good intentions? I say it is for all; but the commencement of the result was that *change in his mind*, which was the efficient cause of all the rest. It was the *determination* made by himself, and carried out into action, to become an obedient and dutiful son, and this and its effects are expressed by all these various methods.

To return now to the case in hand. You will find in the Bible that feelings, words, and actions, all are required, but that there is something which is an indispensable principle, from which all the rest are expected to flow, and which is often called by the name of these fruits.

We are all required to give up the pursuit of worldly plans or pleasures, as the engrossing object of life, and to choose God as our portion, and his service as our business, and his will as our guide. And when we have done this, we shall then, in consequence, love and appreciate his character, admire and reverence his laws, repent of our past neglect and disobedience, and “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” When such a change in the mind takes place, and is carried out into action, then we are new creatures, born again, regenerated, and, as all our powers are consecrated to the

service of God, it is proper to say we have that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

It seems to me if you will re-examine the Bible with this view of the subject, you can make all parts of it harmonious. Take, for example, Christ's sermon on the mount. There are the rules of the family of our heavenly Father, and there also we are told "no man can serve *two* masters," "ye cannot serve God and mammon," "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That is, "give up the pursuit of the world and its vanities, as the chief good, take God as your master, and these are the rules he gives you to obey."

As you go on still farther, you find exhortations to repentance; (that is, to that state of mind of which repentance is *one part*.) to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to put such confidence in his character, authority, and laws, as to *obey* them. You are told, "ye must be born again," or become a new man, by giving up what most men follow as the chief good, and taking an entirely new pursuit, involving new feelings, interests, and actions. And when you come to the passage, "he that *believeth and is baptized* shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," you have a full illustration of this method of interpreting scripture.

It is *belief*, or such confidence in Christ as a teacher and Savior, and such a *determination* to obey, as produces appropriate actions, which is the indispensable condition. *Baptism* is the mode of

avowing publicly this faith, and it is taken for granted that as it is required, it will always attend such practical belief. Whoever does these two things, one the essential and the other the attendant, is saved. But who is damned? He that *believeth not*. The *rite* is omitted here, for it is a non-essential to salvation, though it is a precept of duty.

Now you often find the *fruits* or effects of this change of character put as *its name*, and thus promises are made of salvation to the meek, the peace makers, the pure, the just; not that mere *acts* of justice, meekness, and purity will save a man, without the required state of mind, but they are put as the names or indications of that character which fits a man for heaven.

You proceed to state another view of the subject that presents itself to your mind, and ask my views upon it; namely, that God has revealed in the Bible all the various moral duties we owe to ourselves and to our fellow men; that the *love* he requires is merely *obedience* to these commands, as we read expressly “this is the *love of God*, that ye *keep his commandments*.” According to this, the man who comes the *nearest* to this perfect pattern is the best Christian, and gives the best evidence of love to his Creator.

In reply, I remark that this position seems to me to involve many insuperable difficulties.

In the first place, it makes a man’s future eternal happiness depend more upon his constitutional temperament, than upon his virtuous efforts. For example, among the commands of religion we

find anger forbidden, we find meekness enjoined, forgiveness of injuries, and strict government of the tongue, so as never to render railing for railing. Now here is one man born with quick sensibilities to injury, very excitable, and with strong feelings. He goes into the jarring elements of society, meets the injustice, irritation, misrepresentation, and vexatious trials to which such a mind is constantly exposed. He is constantly irritated and excited, his strong passions demand constant government, his impetuosity leads him to say and do a thousand things that provoke retaliation and temptations to farther anger. Amid all these difficulties he makes great efforts at self government, and actually succeeds, thousands of times, in governing his temper and his tongue, and yet he often fails.

Another man is born with a phlegmatic temperament, with obtuse sensibilities, and with a quiet and equable temper. He gives small occasion of provocation, and when he is subjected to things that are irritating and provoking to minds of quick sensibilities, his obtuseness of feeling protects him like a snail in its shell. He passes through life, and scarce ever makes any effort at self control, or gains any habits at self government, because he seldom has any occasion to form them. Now on the rule of trial you present, the man of quick and generous feeling, though he has made a thousand fold more efforts to be virtuous than the man of a colder temperament, yet as to real *actions*, has actually failed oftener. He probably has been in a passion and spoken hastily and in anger a thou-

sand times more frequently than the other man. Now is it not the dictate of justice, that the man who has made the *most virtuous efforts*, and has succeeded most in vanquishing temptations, deserves the most reward? And yet by the view you propose, each man is rewarded just according simply to his *actions*, and not according to his virtuous efforts. For the rule is, not to be angry, not to rail with the tongue, not to allow a spirit of revenge; and if we are to be tried by this rule, then it is *actions* and not *virtuous efforts* that are to be brought to the test. And it is the number of actions, also, that is to be considered.

A second difficulty is, that this view presents no rule for determining what is the indispensable method of securing salvation. Here are multitudes of strict requisitions laid down in the Bible, extending to the thoughts, feelings, habits, words, and actions, of all mankind, in all situations and relations. In all these we are required to “be *perfect*, even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect.” No one pretends that any human being ever did, or ever will attain to this standard of perfection; the question then arises, “where is the point which, if we attain we are saved, and if we fall short we are lost?” The Bible is silent here. It lays down its strict rules, and gives no intimation how many times we may fail, and yet escape the penalties of disobedience. The requisitions say, “do this and thou shalt live;” but it does not add how many times we may *fail* and yet live.

The Bible certainly does divide mankind, both in this world and in a future state, into *two classes*, and into *only* two ; saints and sinners, the righteous and the wicked, the holy and the unholy, the children of the world and the children of God. It shows that there are but two worlds to which our race is hastening ; one holy and happy, the other guilty and miserable. Of any middle state of purgatory, it not only gives no sign, but it utterly dis-  
countenances the idea.

Now if men are to be judged by their obedience to the laws of rectitude revealed in the Bible, where is the dividing line to sweep ? Is it to be so many good deeds and so many bad—a regular system of book-keeping of debt and credit ? You will find this in the legends of the Romish church, where some exceed the appointed demand, and lay up good works to help the deficiencies of others ; and where a purgatory is invented, to help out, by penal inflictions in a middle state, what is not effected here. But the Bible gives you no aid in this way. It reveals all its pure and perfect rules, and never releases from obligation in a single case ; nor does it pretend to draw a line of demarkation that will place all men in two classes on the ground of *good works*.

Another objection to this view you propose, is, that it is opposed by all those parts of the Bible which indicate that men undergo a *sudden change* of character. Now if it was the amount of good actions that decided a man's preparation for heaven, no such sudden change of character would

take place. If he is in great arrears, by a long course of past sin, time is demanded to make up the balance, and an aged sinner is past all hope of remedy. But there are multitudes of places in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, where men are suddenly changed in their characters, and from being called aliens, children of darkness, and other similar terms, are changed to children of the light, and of the household of God.

This view is also opposed by all those passages that make a certain *state of the mind* the indispensable pre-requisite to salvation; for example, “without *faith* it is impossible to please God,” “he that *believeth not* shall be damned,” and many others of similar import. Now these terms do not express a certain amount of good works, but they *do* express a certain state of mind or character.

Lastly, if you will examine the first part of Romans, and the Epistle to the Galatians, you will find this view of the subject fully and directly controverted. Though you will probably find many things hard to be understood, in some parts of these writings, you will not fail to discover that the current of instruction has this as its chief object, to prevent men from trusting to their good works, or the conformity of their actions to law, and to make them understand that we are to be justified *by faith*, or by that character or state of mind which consists in *so* believing in Jesus Christ, as to love him, and make it the business of our lives to please him.

You will find, that this view which you have pre-



sented, has been equally the resting place of the pagan, the Mahomedan, the infidel, the catholic, and that class of *moral* men among protestants, who deny the necessity of regeneration. They all trust to their *conformity to the rules of rectitude in external actions*, without reference to the state of *the heart*; or in the language of scripture, they seek "justification by the works of the law"—instead of "justification by faith;"—or in the language of common life, they hope to be saved by their good moral life, instead of becoming truly pious.

And that class of men, who, without any pretension to religion, maintain a fair exterior, in all social and moral duties, sustain their sense of safety, very often, by judging of Christians, by their own standard, instead of the Bible. They point to those men, who claim to be religious men, and show their weakness and failings; their incorrect notions of right and wrong; their bad habits; their unamiable natural temperament when exposed to temptation, and rejoice in their own superior virtue, and expect to fare at least as well, in a future life, as most who profess to have religious principles and feelings. Yet, if it be true, that "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart;" if it be true, "that by the works of the law, shall no flesh living be justified;" if it be true, that the contrite Magdalene, and the humble publican were justified, when those, whose external conformity to law were condemned; then a time may come, when some of the fairest and most upright and honorable before men, who sat-

isfy themselves with their own virtues, will “begin with shame to take the lowest place ;” while many, who, in circumstances of difficulty and trial, have had to contend with bad early habits, with incorrect principles of right and wrong, with an unhappy natural temperament, and who, under these difficulties and defects, secured but little complacency from their fellow men, will be called to a higher place, by him who has read their hearts ; who has daily heard their prayers for help against temptations ; perceived their humiliation and deep contrition for all the infirmities and wanderings from duty, and seen, through all their faltering and imperfect course, the sincere desire and constant effort to serve and please him.

It is God alone, who knows how to understand the effects of false principles, early instilled, which pervert the judgment ; of the bias of passion leading astray ; of limited and distorted views of Christian duty, and all the other allowances to be made in deciding the Christian character. The world thinks that it is claimed for religious men, that they are better than any other men, in all matters of *external duty*. This is not so. All that can be claimed is, that they have a principle of action, stronger and better than any other ; more efficient in producing every good word and work, and that *all other things being equal*, religious men would excel those without religion, in every social and moral duty. But when the influences of natural temperament ; of early education ; of induced habits ; of false notions of right and wrong, and

of all the varied circumstances of temptation and trial are to be brought into account, all that can be claimed for religion, is, that it makes men *better* than they would be without it ; that it is a *rectifying* principle that *improves*, though in this world, it never *perfects* the character.

The Bible is the standard of perfect rectitude in every moral duty. The moral man compares his life with it, and takes comfort in thinking how much nearer he approaches it, than many men of piety ; the religious man compares his life with it, to realize his defects, to acknowledge his unworthiness and to be quickened in new efforts after love and obedience, at the thought of the sacrifice by which his deficiencies are atoned for, and the love and pity of the Almighty Friend, who can bear with, and pardon all his sins, when they are confessed with penitence and the sincere intention of renewed future efforts at obedience.

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER XI.

DEAR SIR.

Your last letter contains an objection which is the most commonly urged to the views I have presented, and which it is the most difficult to answer. You say that there is no reasonable ground for dividing all mankind into two classes, one that will go to heaven and be happy forever, while all the rest of the human race, however amiable or virtuous they may be, will go to everlasting misery. You ask me to look at such and such persons, lovely in character, exemplary in duties, using their time and influence to promote the welfare of society, and blessing with their love and care, a family that is growing up under their influence, to usefulness and happiness. You then point me to others, who are much inferior in character and practice, so far as man can discern, and yet because, as you say, they go to evening meetings, and prayer meetings, and support tract distributions, and talk religiously, and follow a certain course of religious operations, will spend an eternity of happiness ; while those who seem to you so

much more exemplary, are doomed to everlasting misery.

In regard to this, which I confess is a difficult point to dispose of satisfactorily, I would first remark; suppose I could not say a single word to lessen the difficulty to your mind; suppose it should stand as mysterious, as unreasonable, and as unsatisfactory as it now appears; would it abate or alter the matter of *your* duty and interest? Would it not still be true, that we can *know* of nothing in regard to a future state but what the Bible tells us; that we are there told, that there is a world of endless happiness and of eternal misery; that we are told, that one portion of the human race is destined to one, and the rest to the other world; that we cannot be saved by works of righteousness, but by that "faith which works by love;" that this faith is to be obtained as "the gift of God," while we "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?" And if this be so, is it not perfect folly and madness for you to live in the neglect of these duties and exposed to such hazards, when it is in your power to secure entire safety, and simply because there are some difficulties in the practical application of these truths, that you do not know how to explain satisfactorily?

Suppose a being with just the same powers of reason, and maturity of intellect as yourself, should suddenly appear here, from a world where pain and evil were never known; where all beings and every event were tending to good only and continually. Suppose he should come to

you and ask for information to guide him safely in his new circumstances. Suppose him to have been before only a spirit, entirely ignorant of the laws of matter, and you begin your instructions. "The Being that made this world," you say, "is perfectly benevolent, and almighty in power, and wishes your highest good, and if you will follow the directions I give, and which I have learned from him, you will be happy. Now this substance which looks so bright here, is *fire*. But your body is so made, that if you touch it, it will produce keen suffering."

The new comer replies, "I cannot believe it, for I feel a strong curiosity to investigate its properties for myself, by touching it. My Creator implanted this desire with the intention doubtless, that it should be gratified ; he is perfectly benevolent and wishes my enjoyment ; he is almighty, and can save me from the suffering. I shall not regard this prohibition, for it seems to me needless and unreasonable." But you urge the danger of the course he proposes ; you tell him that if he should step into a fire to make such an experiment, it would not only cause him intense immediate suffering, but probably would make him a sufferer all his life, and you might point to some poor cripple, who was thus rendered a useless burden to society, and to himself. But he argues the case with you. "Is it not unreasonable," he says, "that in attempting to gratify a laudable curiosity, a principle implanted by my Maker, and just for a moment's trial, that I should suffer so much, and still

worse, that I should be a sufferer and useless for a whole life? Is it not unreasonable, that there should be two classes, one happy and useful through life, and the other useless and miserable, and for a single momentary mistake, which in some cases is no fault of theirs? Consider how much good I could enjoy and confer during a whole life. Do you think an Almighty Being would allow such a disproportionate punishment as this, for following a natural desire, and that just one single step into fire, would destroy all my comfort and happiness for life? "No, my dear sir," he might say, "this is too unreasonable and unjust, for me to believe. You must be mistaken; I shall proceed in my experiment, unless you can make the matter much more rational than it now appears." How would you deal with such a man; for just as you would deal with him, just so I beseech you to deal with yourself.

Suppose you could convince him on this point of his duty and interest, and should then begin to give him some cautions, to regulate his moral interests.

You caution him in regard to lotteries, gambling and other dangerous pursuits; and tell him, that if he takes such and such a course, he will almost inevitably be ruined for life. You describe the career of young men, who, for yielding to slight temptations, have gradually formed habits they never overcame. And you give him this as the *general law* of duty, gained by experience.

“Never gamble or engage in lottery speculations, for if you do, you will be ruined for life.”

Here he again questions the rationality of this law and its penalty. “Is it so, that this world is governed by a perfectly benevolent God, one who is also, almighty in power? It cannot be then, that he would doom a young mind for a whole life, to disgrace and poverty and vice, just for spending a few hours in an amusement which surely does no one any harm. What more harm in shuffling a few cards for amusement, than in riding on horseback? And why may not a man if he has money, that he is willing to risk in the lottery office, run his chance of getting money, which others voluntarily risk for their chance of making gains? I see no such difference between this and other business, where men run chances of gain and loss in speculations; and yet you say, that one set are rewarded by wealth, honor, virtue and safety; and the other set are doomed to lose every thing that is dear and valuable, and that too, for a whole life.”

“And you say that many who are ruined by lotteries and gambling, are more amiable men, kinder fathers and husbands, more generous and honorable than thousands who escape their miserable fate. Now explain to me how this is consistent with reason or rectitude, when an almighty and a benevolent Being governs this world? Why does he not devise some means of saving from the dangers of lotteries and gambling? Why does he not retrieve the fortunes and characters of the



young and inexperienced that are led into such dangers? How can it be, that men should be divided into two classes, to be rewarded so differently, when there is so little ground of distinction as to the real worth of character? In many cases, the selfish, cold hearted, mean, vindictive, deceitful and cruel, are rewarded with wealth and honor; while the generous, the honorable, the refined, just for a single mis-step in pursuing gaming or lotteries, are reduced to ruin and misery for a whole life. I cannot believe that this will be so, for I know my Creator is wise, and benevolent, and almighty. I am determined to try lotteries and gaming, and enjoy that species of pleasurable excitement, and I believe I shall somehow be saved from the evils, by my merciful, and benevolent, and Almighty Parent. Besides some do escape, and why may not I?"

Now I again ask you how you would reason with, and advise such a man, and then see if the same course might not meet your own objections to the revelation of heaven, in regard to a future state, and the division of all men into two classes—the one to be forever happy, and the other forever miserable.

Now consider some other cases on earth, which are similar in their nature. It is the law of Providence, that children must so love and honor their parents in the family state, that the will of the parents should have the control, and the will of the children be subordinate. No family can exist

happy and prosperous, unless this rule is sustained. The children must not insist on perceiving the rationality, the wisdom, or the goodness of every one of the requisitions that are made ; they must have such love to their parents, and such confidence in their wisdom and goodness, as to be willing to obey their commands, even when they cannot perceive the good tendencies, or benevolence of the measures they propose. We all can see, that a law demanding from children love and implicit obedience to good and wise parents, is indispensable and right ; and that the penalty of present unhappiness and punishment, and in some cases disinheritance, and total ruin for life, might be indispensable, as sanctions to sustain such a law.

We can perceive that in such an infinite family of active, intelligent minds as people the universe, such a law in regard to the Creator and Father of all, is as indispensable, and that there must be *some* sanction to enforce it. Now what do you know of the mode of our existence after death ? What right have you to say that we shall not by passing into the world of spirits be placed instantly in such circumstances of temptation, that nothing but a habit of submitting our will to the Creator, and such love as makes it our supreme desire to please him, will save us from such a course of disobedience, alienation, and wickedness, as would never change, and so bring all the miseries that the nature of mind and the necessary administration of justice inevitably must produce in such a course ? How do you know but that a spiritual existence is

one in which our thoughts and feelings, instead of being concealed in the recesses of our bosoms, shall all "be open and naked" to the inspection of every other mind? What a hell would this world become were such a revealing to take place on earth! And what right have you to say it will not be so in the world of spirits, and that the safety and happiness of the universe of minds depends upon the ability to meet safely such a trial, and that nothing but love to our Creator, and the supreme desire to please him, would afford us such safety?

Moreover, we do not find that the experience of the evils and sufferings attendant on crime in this world, have any tendency to make men break off their vicious courses; on the contrary, the longer men give way to crime, and the more they suffer for it, the more inveterate their habits grow. What right, then, have you to expect, or to hope, that going into the invisible world will alter this tendency of mind. Suppose, now, that men should suddenly be made immortal in this world, and that all fears of death and a future state were at an end. Every man would then feel that whatever he did, he should live forever. What do you suppose would be the tendencies of things here? Those who had the strongest principles of virtue would resist the increased temptations, and their virtue being strengthened by trial would become more and more elevated and pure. On the contrary, others would take a downward course, growing worse and worse. Now two such opposite classes,

one of elevated purity and virtue, and the other of debased and malignant vice, could not exist together. They would draw off into separate communities; and in the progress of ages, it seems to me, the whole human race would belong to one or the other of these classes.

Now is not the Scripture doctrine of what takes place when men become immortal, after death, exactly what we should expect would take place, were they to become immortal in this state of being? You can see how it *might* be in this world; that some who now are deemed lovely and excellent, should in new circumstances of trial become guilty and miserable. It may be that it is this tendency of mind that will lead to the same results in future. The Bible simply reveals the fact that there will be this division into two classes in the future state, and the philosophy of the fact is not revealed.

But is it wise or safe or right, because you cannot see the rationality or equity of what the Bible declares, to assume that it is false and act on this supposition? Do you not take as foolish and dangerous a course as the supposed inquirer who is ignorant of the laws of matter, would take in running into the fire, because he could not see the wisdom or benevolence of the terrible sanctions appended to the violation of this law? The Bible says that those who do not obey the requisitions of the gospel will exist forever sinful and forever miserable. It does not pretend to explain whether it will be a necessary result from the present

known laws of mind passing into new and untried temptations, or what is the particular course of influences that will lead to this result. It simply records the *fact*, that all who take a certain course in this life will be happy forever, and those who take another course will be miserable forever.

There may be many theories that might show how this could be made consistent with wisdom and benevolence and almighty power. But suppose there was not *one*, even conceivable; would it be wise, or safe, or right, to run the hazard of acting as if it were false? Would it be right to say, with our limited views of the universe and the general tendencies of things, that there actually was no way to render such a result consistent with the revealed character of God, simply because we, creatures of an hour and in this small nook of God's universe, could not discover what it is?

It appears both necessary and right that our Creator should be allowed that place in our confidence and affection, which parents always demand from children; it seems right that we should trust his superior wisdom and goodness and do what he requires, without claiming that we shall first understand the consistency of every thing he has said and done. He does not require us to violate our reason or conscience in any one thing he demands; he does not exact that we should believe absurdities or contradictions, nor do any thing which is made obligatory from such a belief. He tells us what the right way is, and what the good is we shall gain by walking in it, and what the evil is if

we depart from it, and it is not our place to demand, the whole exhibition of those vast plans and relations that make these consequences right or inevitable ; plans and relations which he can behold and understand, but which may be as far beyond our comprehension, as is the philosophy of medicine and the human frame, beyond that of the infant that by parental authority is made to swallow nauseous drugs.

I defer the other topics suggested by you for another communication.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XII.

MY DEAR SIR :

You present the *lives* and *characters* of those who profess to be regulated by the principle of supreme love to God, as involving a question of difficulty. There are several considerations which perhaps will serve to lessen this difficulty—for it certainly is one of the greatest impediments to the cordial reception of the truths of the Bible that can be found.

The first consideration I would suggest is this, that those who do not claim to be religious, usually misunderstand the nature of the profession made by those claiming to possess the principle of piety.

This profession is supposed to be a declaration, that they who make it, are persons who are better in dispositions, habits, and conduct, than other men. But this is not the nature of their profession. They profess that they love their Maker, and that the desire to please and obey him has the first place in their hearts, and that hereafter it is to be

the business and chief object of interest through life to do his will. Now many who make this profession have naturally unamiable dispositions, while long indulgence has engendered pernicious habits that it requires much time and effort to conquer. Many also have incorrect notions of what is right and wrong ; and many have not just conceptions of what God does wish and require from those who love him. A man may really desire to please his Maker more than to do any thing else, and may habitually strive to do it, and yet from these causes, may not appear so amiable or exemplary to the world, as those whose natural disposition, education, correct notions of right and wrong, and early habits, have prepared more readily and easily to discharge the relative duties of life. It is necessary to see the *motives*, *feelings*, and the *efforts*, men make, (of which He who looks on the heart alone can judge,) before it can be decided who possesses the character, on which our eternal destiny hangs. Still the Savior has truly said, “by their *fruits* ye shall know them ;” and a man who really does desire to please his Creator more than to gain any earthly good, must show it *in some way* to those who live in daily intercourse with him. And if a profession of piety is not accompanied by *improvement* in character, which is visible to those who have an opportunity to judge correctly, there is not reason sufficient for believing that the reality exists.

Another consideration to be regarded, is the incorrect, deficient notions as to the nature of



religion which are so prevalent among those who claim to possess it.

All who take the Bible as a guide come to one result, and that is, that *perfection* in thought, word, and deed, is not the test of the reality of religion. All agree that the most pious men on earth are not free from sin. Nor has any sect ever decided any exact line of demarcation in this respect, so as to maintain that all who come up to this line are truly pious, and all who fall short are not. Of course any *specific amount* of good deeds is not the evidence sought for by any. But it will be found that there are a variety of tests of Christian character among different classes who profess the religion of the heart. Go among one class of Christians and you will find that the excitement of the feelings, and a round of means for promoting such feelings, is deemed the chief test of Christian character. Though they in words acknowledge that an exemplary, consistent discharge of all social and relative duties is required, and is a test to be relied on in judging of Christian character, yet strong and lively affections, and regular attention to the means of awakening them, is deemed the *chief* thing; so much so, that in many cases it receives the absorbing attention, and while a certain state of feeling is sustained, the evidence of piety is deemed satisfactory, and as these feelings diminish, Christian hopes are diminished. Such persons are very liable to neglect their relative and domestic duties, and to forget that both their Maker and their fellow men

regard *improvement in character* as the best evidence of right religious feeling.

Another class regard with disproportionate estimation, active efforts in promoting the extension of religion and sustaining benevolent enterprize, as the chief test of Christian character. If their time and money and daily interests are thus employed, they feel satisfied of the reality of their Christian character, and give too little importance to the feelings of the heart and the daily deportment of life.

Another class make the evidence of religion to be chiefly a moral, honest, exemplary discharge of all social and relative duties; and think little of taking care of their thoughts and feelings, and little of their obligations to employ their time, talents, and property, in promoting the object for which Christ died, the redemption of their fellow men from the everlasting hazards to which they are exposed.

Others place the chief evidence of piety on correct doctrinal views, and regard as the best evidence of Christian character their orthodox creed, and the zeal with which they defend and propagate it, without sufficient reference to their feelings or their conduct.

Much of this is owing to the style of instruction imparted by religious teachers. One class are constantly receiving stirring appeals to their feelings, and the importance of preserving a right frame of mind, and of cultivating certain emotions, is the prominent and leading object of instruction.

Another class have a disproportionate amount of stimulus in regard to the benevolent enterprizes of the day, and too little in regard to other duties. Another class hear little of the above topics, while the social and moral duties are subjects of disproportionate instruction. Another class are over-instructed in doctrinal peculiarities. The strong tendency of the human mind to extremes, and the difficulty of obtaining consistent and well balanced views of complicated and varied duties, is in nothing more clearly illustrated than in these divergencies in religion.

To secure *all* the fair proportions and perfect consistency of that christian character drawn forth in the Bible, in the instructions of religious teachers, or in the exhibitions of christian conduct, is a rare and difficult attainment, and probably never was so entirely accomplished, as in the apostolic ages. Then we find, from the writings of scripture and the testimony of history, that the followers of Christ were known by the purity of their lives, by their meekness and forbearance under provocations, by their readiness to give up all their property and time to promote the extension of religion, by their zeal in contending earnestly for the faith delivered to the saints, and by their devotion and heavenly mindedness; while in the preachings and writings of their religious teachers, (as recorded in the New Testament,) we see how this fair symmetry of Christian character was promoted and sustained, by instructions and example.

But when we are called to judge of Christian character at the present day, it is necessary to take into consideration, the particular influences to which the mind has been subjected, in aiming after that character which prepares for heaven. Those who suppose the chief duty of religion consists in taking care of their emotions, and that this is the way in which they can most acceptably serve and please God, must not be judged of as they would be, were their intellectual views of duty more enlarged and consistent. Those who conceive that the chief way in which they are to show the devotion of their will and heart to God, is in attending to religious meetings, or objects of benevolent enterprize, are not to be judged of, as if they had more correct and consistent views; and so with all the rest. We are to inquire first, what a man's intellectual views are, as to what his Maker most wishes and demands, before we can judge how earnestly, or how sincerely he is striving to do his will.

Another very important consideration in estimating Christian character, is the astonishing and universal blindness of mankind to their own defects, and their mistaken estimate of their own motives and actions. The more extensively and intimately I have mingled with society, and especially with those who are governed by religious principle, the more occasion I have had to observe and reflect on this fact.

How often have I heard persons lamenting evils in the character, or feelings, or actions of

others, with the correctest notions of right and wrong, and quick sensibilities to the mischiefs engendered, and without the least apparent consciousness that they themselves were noted for the very defects they lamented in others. I have heard persons of good sense, and good feelings, complain of the pride, or selfishness, or scandalizing propensities of others, and ending off with the comfortable assurance, that what ever might be their *other* defects, they were sure they did not possess the very trait of character which they had been lamenting in others, and which the community in general, and their intimate friends deemed to be their own peculiar weakness and defect. There are many good people, and those who I hope are possessed of real piety, who I suppose never have even suspected that they had the faults of character, which in society were universal subjects of remark.

I have sometimes been absolutely terrified at these exhibitions of the blindness of good and sensible people to their own faults; and have feared that I myself might be under the same hallucination, and really be most defective, where I supposed myself most free from deficiency; nor would any thing but the frankness, the sincerity, and the discrimination of friends, whose opinion I could trust, alleviate such apprehensions. I have often thought, that an honest and faithful friend, who would dare to speak the truth, and who had the kindness and the tact to discharge this most difficult duty of friendship wisely, was more to be prayed and sought for, by all who desire to under-

stand and to improve themselves, than any other blessing of this life.

Another thing, I remark also, that has a bearing on this point, and that is, the different notions of right and wrong, among people of principle and piety. Every man judges of his neighbor by his own rule of rectitude ; and it is very rare, that inquiry and allowances are made, for what may be the different opinions as to right and wrong, of those who are judged.

In nothing is this more obvious, than in judging of the evidences of true piety. Some persons consider that a serious countenance and manners, or plainness in dress, or serious and religious conversation with all around, or the frequency of attendance on public and social worship, are the things to be chiefly regarded as evidence of piety. Others think that religion is not inconsistent with a cheerful and smiling face ; that sprightly and amusing conversation at certain times, has a place in the passages of life, as properly as serious and devout remarks ; that we are to regulate our attendance on religious services by the state of our health, the nature of our domestic duties, and other circumstances ; that serious conversation has its appropriate place, and time, and may not always be indiscriminately addressed ; that what is right, and proper, and expedient at one time, is wrong, or inexpedient at another ; that, in regard to dress and expenses, circumstances modify the rules of duty, so that, in some circumstances, it is

as much a duty to dress handsomely, and in conformity to the notions of society around, as in other cases, it is a duty to dress plainly.

Some persons deem it a religious duty to practise self-denial in food, and dress, and conveniencies, to promote religion; and I have heard persons, who do not believe in the reality of religion say, that if Christians *really believed* what they profess, and felt as they ought, they would instantly give up all their property and time, to save the souls of their fellow men from eternal ruin. But others suppose that such a course, taken by all real Christians, would do more harm than good; that Christians must act by *general rules*, which it would be safe and beneficial for *all* to adopt, and that if all Christians forsook the station, and the influence, and the employments they hold, or so altered their mode of living as many deem a rule of duty, thousands would be ruined, and the means of doing good entirely taken from multitudes who now hold and employ them. Now when there are such a variety of opinions among wise and good people, about what is right and wrong, and as to what are the evidences of piety which should be exhibited to the world, there is much room for the exercise of charity in judging of the motives and conduct of those who profess to be regulated by a supreme desire to please and obey their Maker. Did all Christians view their own conduct and characters as the world around them do, and have the same notions of right and wrong, as their judges, and still

maintain their claims to piety, I should indeed feel that there was little but hypocrisy and pretence among the professors of religion.

Another consideration, and that a most melancholy one, is this, that there is great reason to fear that many who profess piety are mistaken in their views, either as to what real piety is, or else as to their own character in this respect. I believe there are few who can properly be called hypocrites, meaning by it, those who make a profession of religion for the influence or credit they may gain, when *they know* they are without it. At least I have seldom, if ever, met a person whom I should feel justified in charging with this crime. But I greatly fear that there are many who appear before the world as making these claims, who deceive themselves with a hope which is vain, and as I mingle in society with many who are never known as professors, but by their approach to the communion table, I cannot help reiterating with anxious sorrow the inquiry of the disciples, "Lord are there *few* that be saved?" and remembering the sad response, "*Strive* to enter in, for strait is the gate and narrow the way, and *few there be* that find it." And yet I have often been comforted, by finding that some, for whom at a distance I indulged such fear, when they came in such close contact that I could know their motives, interests, efforts and intentions, were in reality possessed of the deepest, most sincere, and constant desire to please and obey their Maker; and that it was



either mistaken notions of duty, or shrinking fastidiousness, or timidity and reserve, or other peculiar circumstances, that had prevented their light from shining before the world.

These are the considerations I would offer for modifying the estimate usually put upon the inconsistencies and failings of Christian professors. But supposing there was as much hypocrisy and pretence among Christian professors, as is claimed by those who are sceptical as to the reality of religion; there surely are *some* whom *all* must allow are sincere, and consistent, and exemplary in their Christian character. I think you will find *some* whom you will say have a right to profess religion, and no one can call in question their sincerity or consistency. At least, if you had lived in as close intimacy with the religious world as I have, you would say this. For you would find many, who you could not doubt, were really living above the world, while they live in it; who are more anxious to keep "a conscience void of offence toward God," than for any thing else; who seek wealth chiefly as the means of doing good, and influence, and honor to devote to the same end; who ask and desire for their children, not the riches, and honors, and pleasures of this world, but a place, as faithful and self-denying laborers for God, and would rejoice more to send them as missionaries, to spend a life of labor and care, than to place them on thrones, merely to receive and enjoy all this world can bestow. Now if this is so, where is the difficulty, if all the rest are hypocrites?

*All the world* profess to be *honest*. Where is the man out of prison, that does not make such pretensions; and yet how many do you find, who are strictly honest, upright men, whose word is as good as their bond, to whom you would trust all your fortune without security? And yet the false professions of millions in regard to honesty, does not stagger your faith in the few, nor make you sceptical as to the question, whether there is any such thing as honesty. Why then should the false professions of the many in regard to religion, weaken your faith in the reality of a principle which you can discern, at least in a few, which the Bible recognizes as real, and which it enjoins as much as it does truth and honesty; while it is pointed out as the only way of security and happiness for eternity.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XIII.

MY DEAR SIR,

The difficulty which you present in your last letter, is one which I suppose has met every human being, that has contemplated his religious obligations, and turned his attention to the Bible. That we should be required to obey our Creator, is a proposition so reasonable and so natural, that it seems almost a self evident duty. And when God is revealed to us, both in the works of nature, and by his word, as possessed of every attribute that can awaken admiration, reverence, and love, it seems also natural and reasonable that the affections should be required ; not only as appropriate to our relations to God, but as the only method of securing ready and cheerful obedience to his laws.

But when this point is reached, and we attempt the fulfilment of this duty, then the difficulties you urge stare us full in the face, and many minds, dismayed and discouraged by what seem insuper-

able difficulties, turn away to indifference, forgetfulness, and hopeless worldliness.

I am sure God does not require anything of us but what we have full ability to perform, and I think I see a way of obviating the difficulties you urge.

It is true, we have not the *direct* control of our affections, so that by a mere act of volition, we can love and hate, just as we can, by an act of our will, either shut or open our eyes. If we love a friend, we cannot, by a mere act of choice, cease to feel this affection. If we are indifferent, or dislike a person, we can no more, by any act of volition, change these feelings into love. And I do not suppose that the divine law demands any such attempts. But though we have not the control of our emotions, by direct acts of volition, we have an indirect control of them, which is quite as powerful, for which we are held accountable, and to which the requisitions of the Bible are directed.

I think I can illustrate my views of the subject by a familiar example. A husband is united to a virtuous and amiable wife, whom he has tenderly loved. But a course of extravagance and vice has estranged him from her; he knows that she has ceased to respect and love him; he is reprov'd by her superior virtues, and irritated by his conscience in her presence. He treats her so unworthily, that all affection ceases on both sides. He learns to think only of her faults, and depreciates or forgets her excellencies, and has lost all desire for her society, and all feelings of affection. Now

suppose he were admonished of his wicked course, and expressed a wish to alter ; he would be directed, in the first place, to “love his wife ;” suppose he should plead that he had not the control of his emotions, that he did not love his wife, and choosing to do so would not produce love ; and then he comes to you to relieve him from this difficulty. You would direct him *to use the appropriate means* of awakening affection. You would tell him to make up his mind to forsake his dissolute companions ; to reform his life ; to return to his wife, and make suitable acknowledgments ; to commence all the practical duties of a kind and attentive husband ; to take all those methods that would be most likely to regain the respect and affection of his wife and to awaken his own regard for her ; and you would assure him that if he did take this course, inasmuch as his wife was excellent and lovely, it would inevitably result in the return of her affection to him, and the renewal of his own affection for her. And every man of common sense would approve your advice, and be certain of its successful results, if it were followed. Here, then, you perceive the manner in which a man has the control of his affections toward a fellow being.

Now I suppose we have the control of our affection, as it respects our Maker, to an equal extent, and that we are to exercise it by similar methods. The husband is not to awaken his affection to his wife by sitting down and thinking of her, and trying by an act of volition to make love spring up in his heart. He makes up his mind in

the first place to use all appropriate means, and while he follows this course, affection springs up to his bosom. So the alien from the heavenly Parent, when "he comes to himself," says, "I will arise and go to my father." He puts himself in the way of duty ; he turns his mind to think upon the folly of his ways ; he repents, and resolves to do no more so wickedly ; he studies the works and the word of his Maker ; he daily seeks to commune with him ; he consecrates his time, property and influence, to his service, and in this course of obedience, emotions of affection soon glow in his bosom, and cheer and invigorate all his efforts.

Now *love*, in the language of the Bible, means the same as it does every where else. It includes not merely the simple emotions of affection, but all the thousand words and actions that are proofs of love. The man then begins to love, who makes up his mind to obey, and commences the course of obedience ; for obedience forms a part of love, as much as the emotions. When we see a son anxiously striving to meet all the wishes and wants of a parent, seeking his society, defending his good name, promoting his interests, and devoted to his will, we say such a son loves his father most devotedly, though we have no other evidence of his feelings. Another son disobeys and disregards his father's requirements, crosses his plans, neglects his interests, avoids his society, and disregards his requests. Suppose we could look into his heart, and perceive that it was sometimes visited with emo-

tions of complacency and affection; still we should say he did not love his father, and bring his conduct as the proof.

Another case might be supposed, of a son who, from the cold dictates of duty, and with the fear of a slave, performed all the external duties of affection, while in his heart he feared and disliked the parent who controled him. These actions might deceive us; but if the father could read the heart of his child, his services would not be received as proofs of love. In all these cases, there is a deficiency, so that love would not be said to exist till it was supplied. Love, then, includes both emotions and corresponding actions.

But as the existence of strong feelings of affection, always does produce actions to correspond, it often occurs that the emotions are spoken of as the principle, and the actions as the fruits. At other times, the actions that are prompted by affection, are called by the name of love; as for example, "This is the love of God, that ye keep my commandments." As if a father should say to his son, "your love is shown by your obedience to my wishes;" or, "obedience is love."

It seems to me, therefore, that the control of our emotions is within our power, and though we cannot control them by direct volition, as men control the movement of their limbs, we have an indirect control that is as efficient, and as properly a subject of divine legislation, as external actions.

In regard to your second objection, the diffi-

culty of *loving an invisible being*. That there is a difficulty here, so far as this, that it would be easier to realize the being and character of God, were he embodied, and in daily connexion with us, I will not deny. The Bible itself implies this, when it says, “if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen.” But there are other considerations that may essentially modify our views of this difficulty.

The evidence of sight and hearing makes much more powerful impressions, than other methods of communication. Beings that surround us, and give us evidence of their feelings and character by their voice and countenance, make more vivid impressions of reality than those whom we cannot see or hear. But there are evidences that we depend upon, and which influence our feelings, and afford as much certainty of existence, as that of sense, so that we have no more doubt or hesitation than if we had seen and heard. Thus a child who has been deemed an orphan, may suddenly come to the knowledge of a parent, may have full confidence of his existence in a foreign land, may learn his excellence of character, may learn by testimony and by letter his tender interest and paternal feelings, and may month after month receive expressions of his love, and the means of comfort and enjoyment. Here is a case in which affection would be awakened for a being who, to the child, is as much an invisible object as God; and all his affections would be called forth



by just exactly such kinds of evidence of the being and character of his father, as we can gain of the existence and character of our Maker.

Now because the evidence of the senses is more vivid and impressive than the other kinds of evidence that prove the being and character of a person we have never seen, it by no means shows that there is not evidence abundantly sufficient to meet all our wants in regard to our obligations to God. The difficulties men experience on this point, arise from their indifference and neglect. If they would take pains to bring before their minds all the evidence they can secure of the existence and character of God, if they would study and ponder his word, if they would live to do his will, above all, if they would, by prayer, seek that supernatural aid of his Spirit to assist them in this effort, which is afforded to all who sincerely seek it, all this difficulty of which you complain would vanish away.

I know that in the case of multitudes with whom I am acquainted, this unrealizing state of feeling, as to the existence, and agency, and presence of God, was diminished in exact proportion to the appropriate and rational efforts that were made to overcome it, until they have attained as full a conviction and feeling of the existence of God, and have been as much affected in thoughts, feelings, and actions, by this conviction, as they ever were by the evidence of sense in reference to their fellow men. Not that the evidence of religious truth is

as vivid and impressive, but that it is as satisfactory and as efficient. And I am sure that if you would take the same course of investigation, action, and communion with heaven, as others have done with entire success, the same results would follow to you; nor have you any right to say it would not be so, until you have made the trial.

Allow me, before I close, to urge the personal, practical duty upon your attention, to which all these investigations relate, and for which I feel particularly interested. Have you not come to the place where you will acknowledge that the Bible has revealed the way of future safety and happiness so plainly, that you can *know* what it is, and know that all who differ are wrong? That is, have you not evidence sufficient to make it folly and madness to act on a contrary supposition? Is there not as much evidence for one way, and as little to oppose, as you ever demand in deciding which of two courses you shall pursue, in regulating your temporal interests? Will you not admit that if you should decide to make the duties you owe to God the chief object of interest, attention, and effort, so that the conformity of your feelings and actions to his revealed will, becomes the most interesting concern of life, that you believe you shall be both safer and happier, both for time and for eternity? Will you not allow that your present course of worldliness is opposed to the spirit and life which the Bible requires, so that though you may be moral in all external duties, and exemplary

in your outward show of reverence and respect for religion, you still are living "without God in the world?"

What, my dear sir, do you think of this passage of holy writ; "The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey the gospel; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power." You are hastening to that dreadful day. - Who are those that "know not God, and obey not the gospel?" Do you stand in those fated ranks? What, then, is that everlasting destruction, denounced so plainly, and so without exception, or reprieve? And what does the Bible teach of the fate of those who are banished forever from the presence of the Lord, and are shut "into outer darkness?"

Oh, sir, will you venture all your happiness for everlasting ages, in a course that runs in the face of these denunciations, and is safe only on the supposition that they are not to be taken in their true and natural meaning? Would you risk your fortune by facing a threat of your national government so clearly expressed as this? Can you devise any form of expression more clear, more terrific, more incapable of misconstruction or doubt? *Destruction* is a word that cuts off the hope of remedy; *everlasting* destruction puts on the seal of rayless, endless despair.

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER XIV.

MY DEAR SIR,

The subjects you present in your reply to my last, have, like every thing else that is good, been perverted to evil, and made the occasion of danger and destruction.

In the first place, you present the question of the supernatural agency of the Spirit of God, and our entire dependence upon him for that change of character which prepares for heaven. In answer to your first inquiry I reply unhesitatingly, that I do believe in the supernatural influences of God's spirit in producing this change of character, and I believe it to be such an interference, as that without it, no human being would ever attain that character which fits a man for heaven. I believe it to be so indispensable, that I never hope for any good to result from any effort of mine, or from any effort of the friends for whom I interest myself, without it; so indispensable, that the gift of these influences is a subject of daily supplication with me for all in whom I feel an interest; and

what I urge as a duty, on all who are seeking to gain correct views and right feelings and actions; so indispensable, that whenever any right desires and good purposes exist in my own heart, or in the hearts of others, I feel it to be an occasion of grateful acknowledgment to the Giver of all good, and the result of those secret, silent influences on the human mind, which the Holy Spirit alone can impart.

But this is not at all inconsistent with the views I have presented, and the duties I have urged upon you. And it seems to me the very letter you have sent to me, contains the key for the solution of what may seem to you inconsistencies on this subject.

Now is it not a fact in your mental history, that you often feel entirely able to do many things which you really wish to do, and yet which you *know certainly* you never shall do, unless the force of motives is very much increased. I have heard you speak of things which you felt that you could do and ought to do, and that you really wished to do, and yet you owned you never should do, because it demanded mental and physical efforts that you were indisposed to make; or, in short, because you felt *too indolent* to do them. Yet they were things which you felt that you could do, and if your fortune were suddenly lost, and your family dependent on such efforts, you *would* do them, and with all the efficiency and success that you could exert *now*, but are indisposed to exert. We all of us are conscious, in every day life, of many little

duties we neglect, that we *can* do, and which we know we should do, were the power of motive but a little increased. We also feel our dependence on each other for furnishing the stimulus of motive. For example, you begin the study of a language which you could learn without a teacher; but the mere circumstance of responsibility to some friend or regular teacher, brings a motive which secures the object, and without which it would fail. So a person exposed by strong temptation to intemperate indulgence, will sometimes seek the aid of friends, to diminish or to furnish strong motives to resist the temptation.

In such cases, the course of conduct which is secured is the result of the agency of two persons. The man who by his presence, his arguments, and his entreaties, saves his friend from the ruin of intemperance, is as much the agent and cause of his salvation, as are the resolutions and efforts of the one exposed to temptation.

I suppose that your mind now is just in this position. You know that you are not in the path of safety and duty. You perceive that there is a course you *can* take which will in all probability secure eternal life. But there are many things that conspire to render such a course undesirable to you. You now have no relish for the duties of religion. You do not feel energy and willingness to attempt the efforts demanded. You are connected with a circle, where such a course would expose you to remarks that you shrink from encountering. You have a sort of pride and fastidi-

ousness, on this subject, that would oppose the concession that you have been wrong, and the assumption of duties and associations that you have heretofore lightly esteemed or despised. You are so engaged in your present interests, that you are entirely averse to turning from them, taking a course that would give other interests the leading place in your mind. In short you *do not wish to do what in your heart you believe to be your duty*. And yet you see that you *can* do it, that you ought to do it, and withal you hope that some day or another you shall do it.

Now I do not suppose that any reasonings or any persuasions of mine, would ever so present the case as to make you willing; nor do I suppose that if you were to day, to make the resolution that I urge upon you, and set out in the course demanded, that you would succeed without some other aid. I suppose that you might perhaps be induced, or might urge yourself, into a more rational course than you now pursue; that you might make efforts such as you have never yet made; but I suppose that your habits of worldliness are so fixed, your aversion to these duties so much stronger than any hopes or fears you or I could awaken, that all would be in vain; so that without some supernatural influence you would as certainly perish, as if you never had any power at all to do what God requires.

And yet your salvation as much depends upon your own efforts, as it does upon supernatural aid. All the influence that friendship can urge, all the efforts you *ever will* make, may be as indispensable

to this result, as the influence which God exerts. And this is exactly the aspect in which the Bible presents it. We are exhorted to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and the very reason assigned is, that "it is God that worketh in us to will and to do." It is therefore a doctrine intended not to be employed, as you seem to be disposed to do, to quiet yourself in a course of sin, with the excuse that you can do nothing till God gives that indispensable supernatural influence. It is an exhortation to this effect—"begin immediately to do your duty, for it is God who co-operates with influences that will enable you to succeed."

This doctrine of the supernatural divine influence which is indispensable to salvation, is one that holds a prominent place in the Bible, and its genuine tendencies are only good. It leads us to feel our dependence on our Maker for the best of all blessings, guidance into paths of virtue and peace. It tends to awaken gratitude and humility, instead of pride and self complacency, at the consciousness of advances in excellence of character. It tends to cherish such a sense of dependence on the mercy and care of God, as sustains a salutary fear of indulging in presumptuous sins. It leads us naturally to seek communion with the Source and Supporter of all our virtuous purposes and best feelings. These are the appropriate and genuine tendencies of this doctrine.

But it has long, and often, been perverted to the destruction and condemnation of those who are



instructed in this truth. They claim that they are dependent upon God for certain influences that are indispensable to success, and therefore they fold their hands in helpless despondence or reckless indolence, neglecting to do what is as indispensable on their own part, and what alone can give any reasonable hope of securing such divine aid.

There are periods in every man's private history, that are points on which turn the greatest interests of existence; moments in which a single balancing decision may change the plans and interests of a whole life, and in my view of this subject, *eternal* interests also are often hung on such momentary decisions.

It seems to me your mind is now at just such a place. You are on a vacillating point. Your present tastes, interests, pursuits, associations, and habits, all draw powerfully one way. Your conscience, your reason, your fears for the future, draw another. The result of this will be one of two courses. You will either decide to give this subject the attention it deserves, and commence a course of serious examination, reflection, and prayer, withdrawing from all opposing influences, and seeking all the aids that can strengthen your purpose, and in this course will, by Divine aid and influence, be led into the way of safety and happiness; or you will continue to seek plausible excuses for neglect or delay; will sooth your conscience by one objection and another excuse; will allow the world, and its bu-

siness and pleasures, to occupy their wonted place in your thoughts and efforts; and so will glide down in the current of worldliness till the day of probation is past, and no place for repentance and redemption is found. Oh, remember, sir, that your existence has commenced and is never to end! Those susceptibilities to high enjoyment and keen suffering are never to cease! Eternal ages are opening their long vista before you. A period is coming when after millions of years are past, you will look back to just this point of your existence, with such intense interest as now cannot be conceived. Will it be with feelings of exulting gratitude and praise, or will it be with intolerable self reproach, unutterable regret, and endless despair?

Truly your friend,

## LETTER XV.

MY DEAR SIR,

In regard to the character of God, and the ordinary association with which it recurs to your mind, I have no doubt your experience is similar to that of many others.

That children and youth are too much accustomed to look upon God as a stern, severe judge, watching for their faults and strict to mark iniquity, rather than as a kind, and a sympathising, father and friend, I have myself had reason to observe. The defects which you point out in the instructions of our religious teachers, where they do exist, I attribute to these causes. In the first place, Unitarians and Universalists commonly attempt to sustain views that lessen the fear of mankind in regard to future eternal punishments, by such representations of the character of God, as I have no doubt are true, but from which they draw false deductions. They paint him as a pitying and sympathising father and friend, and when they have gained that point, they contend that such a

being will not punish for sin with "everlasting destruction."

Their opponents instead of allowing the truth of the picture, and showing that such a lovely being is just the one who must and will punish, if it is necessary to sustain justice, law, and equity, and that his declarations are to be relied on, when he asserts this necessity, have rather been led to draw another view of his character, and represent God as stern in justice, severe in feeling, and inflexible in purpose, while they too much neglect the gentler features of his character. In sustaining their representations they have relied much on the expressions and exhibitions of the Old Testament, without sufficiently regarding one consideration, which I will suggest for your reflection in studying that part of the Bible.

You will often find, especially in Unitarian and sceptical writers, that the sentiments of the Old Testament, and the God of the Old Testament, are spoken of as very different from those of the New, and as far more imperfect and incorrect. Now any thing is *perfect*, when it is entirely and exactly adapted to secure the object which is designed. Suppose now you had gathered a little community of vagabond children, some liars, some thieves, and all ignorant, vulgar, and depraved. Suppose you selected the oldest and best among them as overseers and directors, and then were to draw out a code of rules to regulate their conduct, and appoint the sanctions for enforcing these rules.

You would begin first with the greatest essen-

tials, and knowing that you could not make them do every thing right, you would omit much that you would attempt to enforce in a community of children, who were brought up by intelligent, refined, and virtuous parents. In regard to the motives to enforce obedience, you would use severe measures, much more than would be necessary for children of another character, and those who were appointed to manage them, would dwell much more upon the penalties, and upon your character as a strict and decided man, who would enforce these penalties whenever it was necessary, than they would need to do with children of another character. Now a wise man in judging of your code, and the conduct and representations of your overseers, would compare them not with the standard of *abstract perfection*, but would take into view the circumstances of the case, and would deem them perfect, just in proportion as they were calculated to accomplish the improvement and reformation of the community for which they were intended.

It is thus, that we are to judge of the Old Testament writings. They are records prepared for a "stiff necked, hard hearted race," who for four hundred years had been subjected to the most debasing slavery, among a most degraded people, and their Divine Legislator instituted a system, which for them was *perfect*, that is, it was the best possible system for such a people in such circumstances. This I imagine is the key for unlocking much that often perplexes in the Old Testament; and shows why so much that was evil was tolerated,

or not made a subject of legislation. It was as our Savior says, "because of the hardness of their hearts" God gave them such regulations, and such exhibitions of his character, as were best fitted for their character and condition, and in this aspect the Old Testament is as perfect as the New. But it is not correct to judge of these writings by the standard of abstract perfection, as if intended to disclose an entire and perfect standard of right, nor to take the exhibitions of the character of God, as made to the Jews, as the complete and full display of his character. It was the view best suited to them in their circumstances and with such a character and such habits as they possessed. I suppose that the character of our Savior in the New Testament is the full, consistent and complete exhibition of the character of God, and yet there are no stronger or more full declarations of the awful sanctions of eternity than came from his lips.

In regard to the character of God as it is disclosed both in his works and in his word, I believe that there is not a single trait which is the means of awakening affection in minds constituted like ours, that is not fully disclosed. Will you follow me a few moments while I point out those particulars which are found to be causes of affection, and then trace their manifestations in the character of Him whom we are created to love and obey.

The following I think you will find to include all that can be pointed out as the means of awakening affection in the human mind; *personal beauty, physical strength, intellectual superiority, the power*

*of sympathy, the power of giving and appreciating affection and benevolence.*

The first cause of affection, is *personal beauty*. As God is a Spirit, and does not now manifest himself to the vision of man, in any human form, we cannot ascribe this characteristic to him, in exactly the same sense, as we ascribe it to our fellow beings.

Yet the beauties of the glorious frame in which we dwell, may be viewed as having a similar relation to the indwelling Spirit that pervades them all, as a beautiful human form has, to the mind which animates it. The exterior of nature is the clothing of the Almighty Mind, where in visible forms of beauty, dignity, and grace, he still communes with those children of his love, that lift the adoring eye to him, who smiles in the landscape, and breathes in the gale. The heavings of the ocean, the rush of the tornado, the sheeted lightning, and the talking of fierce thunderbolts, are majestic expressions of his dignity and power. The whispers of evening, the low murmur of waters, the soft melodies of nature, are the breathings of his love. In the graceful movements of vegetable life, in gliding shadows and curling vapors, in the delicately blending colors, and in the soft harmonies of animated existence, may be discovered his gentleness, purity, and grace. The sighing of the wind, the moaning of the wood, the beaming of some lonely star, the pensive gleam of moonlight, recall his tenderness and pitying sympathy. Man cannot turn his eye abroad, without beholding in the thou-

sand mirrors of nature, the glorious and perfect form of him who "filleteth all in all."

The second cause of affection to the human mind, is found in the exhibition of *physical power*. This is one of the inferior causes, and yet it has its influence. Before intellectual superiority held the estimation it now maintains, physical strength was considered as one of the highest characteristics of man, and the exhibition of great prowess was one of the principal causes of respect and admiration, while it still continues to be regarded with pleasure by mankind. The exhibition of this characteristic is constantly before our eyes in the works of the Almighty Hand, and is sublimely portrayed in his Holy Word. The fierce commotions of nature, the shaking of wintry storms, the explosions of volcanoes, the heaving of earthquakes and all the desolating violence in the contest of the elements, exhibit both the active and the restraining power of the Creator; while the majestic force that guides the unshaken spheres in their fixed and mighty orbits, presents a constant and overwhelming exhibition of Almighty energy.

And thus it is sublimely portrayed in his Holy Word. "He removeth the mountains and they know it not; he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof. He commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and he scaleth up the stars. He spreadeth out the heavens alone, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. He maketh Arcturus, Orion, Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. He



stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He covereth himself with light as with a garment, he maketh the clouds his chariot, he walketh upon the wings of the wind. He looketh, upon the earth, and it trembleth, he toucheth the hills, and they smoke. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness, the voice of the Lord discovereth the forests. The Lord sitteth king upon the floods. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, the God of glory thundereth. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out ; lo, these are a part of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him."

The third characteristic which is a cause of affection, is *intellectual superiority*. There is nothing which has been an object of such blind and enthusiastic admiration, as splendid genius and talents, and every other endowment, in the estimation of mankind, has shone with diminished lustre, in the presence of these attributes. It has been that strength of mind which can face danger and overcome the instinctive fear of death, that has given such a charm to bravery. It is the force and activity of intellect, which has thrown much of the halo around the head of the bloody and selfish conqueror ; while splendid literary acquirements, or the force of mighty genius, as displayed in discovering and illustrating the principles of nature, have received equally lasting honors.

In judging of the existence of this trait in our fellow men, it is not by their *language* alone that we learn it. It is by the displays of it in their

course through life ; in their inventions, in the skill displayed in works of design, and in the triumphs achieved by it over matter and mind.

It is thus also, that we can come to a knowledge of this characteristic in the mind of our Creator. It is in the works of his hands, and in the regulation of their multiplied operations, that we discover at once the ingenuity that contrives, the skill that executes, the wisdom that regulates, and the power that sustains. What finite intellect can comprehend the unnumbered wonders of this fair world ? What architect could sweep a dome like that above us, or so firmly and perfectly adjust the magnificent fabric beneath ? What human wisdom could so nicely arrange the fair proportions and equal balancing of mechanical movement we behold on every hand ? What monument of art can compare with the curious and astonishing mechanism of the body we inhabit ; of the eye, that paints within its little orb the glories of the universe ; of the ear, that trembling receptacle of harmonious sounds ; of the human voice, that perfect instrument of music and intelligence ?

And how varied and profuse the contrivances of beauty and skill of Him who plans not only for our comfort, but our delight. He paints the violet and the rose, and sprinkles the fields with all the varied flowers of spring. He adorns the birds of the air with their rich plumage, and gives "the goodly feathers to the ostrich." His hand scatters the purple and gold on the fishes of the sea, lights up the

glow-worm's lamp, and sheds sparkling beauties on the flies and worms.

Nor is it for man alone these beauties are designed, for the mind of the Maker rejoices in the works of his hand. Thousands of flowers are blooming in unexplored forests, and are shedding their beauty and fragrance for him alone. The bottom of the ocean is spread with pearls and softly colored shells, where no eye beholds but his that formed them. The caves of the earth are hung with glittering spars, and adorned with precious gems, that glimmer only for him, who thus exhibits his delight in all that is varied, beautiful and new.

And how clearly is exhibited his love of order, fitness, and propriety, in the material world ! What perfect gradations of classes, orders, genera, and species, in every department of his works ! What perfect regularity in the movement of all the machinery of nature ! The sun ever "knoweth his going down, and the day-spring from on high his place." All the vast mechanism of his hand moves on with a precision and order, unknown in the operations of men.

But the perfection of his skill is not found in the material world. It is *mind* that first bespeaks the impress of Infinite Wisdom ; *mind* with all its fearful and glorious powers ; "looking behind and before" to gather wisdom from the past, and to plan for future time ; wandering in discursive flights through time and space ; collecting, comparing, and combining its varied stores ; endowed

with fearful susceptibilities and trembling sympathies; capable of the highest aims and the noblest aspirations; capable too, of the most terrific perversion, and the most appalling depravation; formed to understand and appreciate moral excellence; endowed with powers of never ending expansion in knowledge, glory, and happiness; formed after the likeness of the invisible God; the miniature image of the Creator Himself!

But the wisdom of our Maker is not more exhibited in the formation, than in the government of mind. Myriads of such gifted beings, furnished with the power of perfect liberty and independent volition, he yet controls, and worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. The greatest statesmen upon earth, when striving to regulate the workings of the human mind, and to control events which depend upon them, forever are baffled, and testify to perpetual miscalculation and failures. The power of controlling circumstances, and of so applying motives as to sway the minds, even of a few of their fellow men, is what none can calculate upon with any certainty, even for a day. But amid millions of these active minds, Jehovah rolls on his undisturbed decrees, bringing good out of evil, order out of confusion, and light out of darkness.

If we approach the Word of God, we shall find the declaration, and the exhibition of the same Divine characteristic. The most elevated human intellect, with all its boasted stores of knowledge,

these inspired interrogatories must humble to the dust. "Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge and wisdom; how thy garments are warm when he quieteth the earth with the south wind? Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong as a molten looking glass? Where wast thou when He laid the foundation of the earth; declare, if thou hast understanding. Whereupon are its foundations laid, or who laid the corner stone thereof, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days, and caused the day-spring to know his place? Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in search of the depths? Have the gates of death been open to thee, or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? Where is the way where light dwelleth, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof? Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow, or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail? Hath the rain a father, or who hath begotten the drops of the dew? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go and say unto thee, here we are? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?"

But there is one exhibition of intellect, which is peculiarly delightful. It is that nice *perception of*

*fitness* which ever secures from any violation of order, delicacy and propriety. Those actions which are the effects of this characteristic, are called examples of the morally beautiful and sublime. In no being ever conceived of or portrayed by man, was there such a display of these excellencies, as we find exhibited in the character of our Almighty Creator, when he dwelt on earth.

He appeared here in the character of a *man*, and entered into all the relations of life, as a son, a friend, and a subject of government. And we see every thing in all his varying circumstances and actions, exactly conformed to the dignity of his divine character, and yet exactly consistent with his voluntarily assumed relations. In his early days, we find him a member of the family circle, and yielding obedience to the authority of his parents. When appearing as a member of community his tribute money was demanded, after calmly expressing his real superiority to human authority, he directed his disciples to pay it, assuming that it became him "to fulfil all righteousness." When interrogated as to his right to instruct, and to assume the authority of a divine teacher by the envious Pharisees, he hushed them by inquiries so appropriate, and so difficult to answer, that they shrunk away from his presence. And when again they tempted him, by apparently constituting him a judge in a civil case, where a guilty female, by the laws of the country, had forfeited life, one single address to their conscience, drove away the

guilty and abashed accusers, and then in consistency with his character of a pitying Savior, he bade the guilty being "go and sin no more."

How exactly appropriate was his tender demeanor, when parents brought their offspring to receive his blessing, and his disciples forbade it. But he rebuked them, and said, "suffer the little children to come unto me. And he took them in his arms, and laid his hands upon them and blessed them." And as the hour of his sorrow drew on, how did these interesting exhibitions cluster around. We behold him at the last supper with his faithful followers, where his beloved friend fears not to lean upon his bosom, and where, as an example of humility, he girds himself to minister as a servant to his friends. We see him in the hour of agony returning for sympathy to his disciples, and finding them asleep, after the inquiry, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" he makes the kind excuse, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." What considerate affection is displayed in his last interview with his disciples, while he seeks to support and comfort them, and to prepare their minds for the scenes of terror and dismay which were to follow. And when denied by his ardent, yet forewarned disciple, how appropriate the rebuke of his speaking eye, as "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and immediately the cock crew." And when brought before the tribunal of his enemies, he was called upon to testify his innocence, as he opened his lips, he was *smitten upon the mouth*. What language could so exactly express

both the calmness of Divine majesty, and the upbraidings of injured innocence; "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

And the last being who engaged his care, ere he closed his eyes in death, was *his mother*. He saw her desolation, he saw his beloved disciple, and to him he bequeathed his filial cares, saying, "Son, behold thy mother!" "And then, knowing that all things were now accomplished, he said, "*It is finished*," and bowed the head, and gave up the ghost!"

A fourth cause of affection is the *power of sympathy*. There is no other cause that so powerfully operates to produce affection, and none which seems so indispensable to its existence. So much does the mind desire it, and so sensibly feel the want of it, that a being entirely destitute of it, one who could neither feel for our sorrows, nor rejoice in our happiness, would be an object of total indifference, if not of aversion.

On this subject, therefore, the Bible is most full and explicit in regard to the character of God. That the Creator should feel sorrow for the griefs, and sympathy in the sufferings with his dependent creatures, instead of being contrary to reason, is one of its deductions. For in all our past experience, we never found an intelligent mind destitute of this susceptibility. Neither is it contrary to any declaration of scripture, for not a passage can be found which forbids this idea. On the contrary, the Bible is filled with the most touching and ani-



mated expressions of the Divine tenderness and sympathy for all his creatures. There cannot be found any language upon earth, which can more vividly portray all the emotions of pity, regret, sorrow, compassion, and sympathy, than are discovered in the inspired pages.

In such language as this, he expresses his paternal yearning over his guilty people: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." And this is the expression of sorrowful regret as his people returned to their sinful courses: "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Israel, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away." And this is the language of pity, as he is called to inflict the necessary punishment of transgression: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still, therefore my bowels are troubled for him, and I surely will have mercy upon him."

In the descriptions of his character we find such language as this: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear him, for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth we are but dust." After a description of the multiplied rebellion and crimes of his covenant people, it is added, "but he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many

a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again." And again, "Many a time did he deliver them, yet they provoked him with their counsels, and he brought them low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies."

But it was when he dwelt upon earth as a "man of sorrows," that we gain the most soothing evidence of this endearing characteristic. We then behold his tenderness to the sick, the sorrowing, and the destitute, while he went about doing good, and comforting all that came to him with any grief. We see his cheerful interest in the happiness of his creatures, when he furnished the exhausted wine of the nuptial feast, and his tender sympathy when with the desolate sisters, he sorrowed at their brother's grave.

And it is this trait in our Almighty Savior, which is especially pointed out, as the source of consolation and support to human sorrow and weakness. We have learned by experience, that those who have suffered affliction themselves, are prepared for a peculiar tenderness of sympathy towards those who experience similar sorrow, and such as no mind can yield which has not tasted grief. This peculiar tenderness is particularly pointed out in the character of our Redeemer. "For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all

points tempted like as we are," and "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor those that are tempted." For in all "things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest."

Every human being, in passing through this vale of tears, will feel the need of such a Friend, and such sympathy can meet all our varied anxieties and wants. If we are called to watch the couch of sickness, or to weep over the tomb of those most dear; there was a time also, when he whom the Savior loved was sick, and when he wept beside his grave. If we are sorely tried, and tempted to evils we dread to encounter, he can feel for us, who himself suffered, being tempted, and "offered up prayers with strong crying and tears." And in those hours of nameless sorrow, when the sickening spirit beholds nothing but darkness, and desolation, and gloom, *one* friend is ever near, who himself has struggled with darkness, dismay, and agony. If we are pressed with the ingratitude and coldness of the world, or mourn the fickleness of friendship, his sympathy can reach the wants of those, for whom he suffered rebuke, and loneliness, and desertion. And in that parting hour, when all the trials of mind, and the sufferings of nature seem combined; when the dying body is racked with pain, and the fainting spirit can only feel itself impure, and sinful, and unworthy; when the wasted hours of life return to upbraid, and every sinful deed to appal; who then can comfort with his sympathizing aid, but He who for our

sake chose to meet the hour of death, in weakness and agony, in darkness and utter desertion !

The fifth cause of love to the human mind, is the *power of giving and appreciating affection*. Every mind is so made, as earnestly to desire some object of affection, that can appreciate and reciprocate the gift. We cannot love any being who would receive such regard with complete indifference, and was himself entirely destitute of any such susceptibility. On the contrary, we delight in strong and ardent feelings, and the heart ever rejoices to receive such manifestations of regard. Every part of the sacred volume is filled with proofs of the existence of this characteristic in the Divine mind. And as if this were the very essence, and chief peculiarity of his character, it is declared, that *God is love*.

The existence of this trait of character, is indicated by actions that manifest regard, by personal sacrifices for the object of affection, by direct expressions of tenderness, and by feelings expressed when affection is doubted, or is not returned.

By all these various modes, we learn the existence of this characteristic in our Creator. In *actions*, he has manifested it, by all the unnumbered contrivances he has formed for our comfort, improvement and happiness ; and in *personal sacrifices*, when for "our sakes though rich he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

But it is not actions *alone*, that satisfy the wants of our minds. The heart seeks the assurance of

*language*, for however substantially kind a friend may be, we know that love is always increased by expressions of affection. Especially would this be the case, were the friend very high above us in rank or intellect, or were we conscious that we had given him but little reason for affection, and much to the contrary.

In compliance with these wants of the mind, we hear the Being who is so far above us in intellect purity and power; the Being who sees so much of evil even in those who serve him best, addressing his earthly children in language of the tenderest affection.

It must be recollected in this connection, that the Jewish nation was the only people who knew the true God, and within its bosom were found those, who alone upon earth were his real children, and gave him the affection of the heart, and the service of the life. Even in one of the worst periods of degeneracy, it is recorded, that there were more than seven thousand of his true worshippers in Israel. And thus we read the record of his affection: "I have loved thee with everlasting love, and with loving kindness have I drawn thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, and he that toucheth thee, toucheth the apple of mine eye. Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine." And thus again, when he dwelt among his children upon earth: "I call you not servants, but I have called you *friends*. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down

his life for his friends. Love one another as I have loved you. He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you."

And thus he addresses his children, when they *doubt* his affection. "But Zion saith, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea she may forget, yet will not I forget thee. And thus He upbraids when his love is despised and unreturned. "Oh, my people, what have I done unto thee, wherein have I wearied thee, testify against me. What evil hast thou found in me, that thou hast gone far from me? Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, we will continue no more with thee? O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity. Return, thou backsliding daughter, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord."

The last characteristic which is the cause of affection, is *benevolence*. This in its most general sense signifies the love of happiness and the desire to promote it. It is generally exhibited in active efforts and in contrivances to promote happiness, and this is the common idea attached to the word. When benevolence operates to prevent individual partialities and personal affection from interrupting the punishment which is necessary for the general

good, it is called *justice* ; when it operates to save from punishment those who deserve it, and who yet can be saved without injury to the general good, it is called *mercy*.

The highest exhibition of benevolence is *self-sacrifice* and *self-denial* in securing good to others, or in saving others from suffering, and this to our minds is the highest exhibition of virtue.

In all these various ways, the benevolent character of God is presented in his word. "Every good and perfect gift," is declared to come down from Him, and every thing that contributes to our ease, comfort and happiness, can be traced to his beneficent hand.

The attribute of mercy has a conspicuous place in the exhibitions of his character. In one of the earliest revelations he is described as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin."

In regard to the exhibition of that modification of benevolence called *justice*, we find our own minds so made, as to detest selfishness, and also, that we have within us a susceptibility, which makes us *desire to punish* the wilful destroyer of happiness. These traits of character, we consider indispensable to the perfection of mind. If we saw a generous, upright, and honorable man, the witness of some act of despicable meanness, or of wanton cruelty, we should expect and desire to see the expressions of his contempt for the one, and

his hatred for the other ; and we should lose something of our estimation of his character, did we not imagine he desired that merited chastisement should be inflicted.

The preservation of universal happiness seems to demand that this characteristic should exist in all minds, and we find it portrayed as a trait in the Divine Being. His is the mind most intensely interested in the happiness of his vast family ; he realizes the mean spirit and desolating influence of selfishness, as no other mind can feel it ; and he knows the necessity of inflicting punishment, in some cases to reclaim the guilty, and in others to deter from crime. We therefore find in Scripture, expressions that indicate the most powerful emotions of indignation at the wanton wickedness of his creatures, and the most terrific language, to declare his resolution to avenge and punish.

But the most exalted display of benevolence that can be made, consists in self-denial and self-sacrifice for the good of others, and this is displayed in the Bible as the chief glory of the character of God ; just as in the character of men, it is deemed the highest exhibition of human virtue and benevolence. “He who being in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It was this manifestation of divine benevolence that awakened such



transport above, as brought the choirs of heaven to chant their songs in the hearing of men. It is this which is claimed as the peculiar glory of the gospel revelation ; it is this which fills the hearts and animates the grateful blessings of the Apostles and holy men of old ; it is this which through all ages has been the theme of love, admiration, praise and adoration, to those who have been saved from among men, while the opening visions of heaven disclose it as the theme of wonder and praise among the unnumbered hosts who have been “washed from their sins in His blood, and made kings and priests unto God.”

It is desirable to contemplate the character of our Creator, not only as possessing those traits of character which give enjoyment to other minds, but as being himself possessed of infinite happiness, and of infinite resources for enjoyment. As our own minds are the miniature image of our Creator, we may suppose that he has all those sources of happiness of which we are susceptible, and probably many others of which we can have no conception.

To Him it must be a source of delight, to exercise his infinite intellect in devising and executing various contrivances in matter and mind, and in governing and regulating all his vast dominions. Infinity and eternity give full scope to the operations of such unmeasured intellect, never to be inactive, and never to tire.

The pleasure which results from the contemplation of interesting traits in intelligent minds, must

be his, to an infinite extent; for beside his relations to his vast family, there seems to be the foundation for this species of enjoyment, and for blissful communion, in the mode of divine existence, as revealed in the eternal and all perfect Trinity.

And in regard to his creatures, his capacities for feeling affection are infinite. The most benevolent earthly sovereign, can be personally acquainted with but few of his subjects; their peculiar traits of character, their fears and hopes, their joys and sorrows, must remain unknown to him; nor if known, would sufficient capacity be found, to feel for all, and sympathize with all. But it is the happy prerogative of our Creator, to know every thought of every creature, and to be interested in all. He can also communicate such a knowledge of himself as to draw his creatures to him, as the beneficent friend to whom alone they are willing to confide all their thoughts, and plans, and hopes, and fears, while they exult in the consciousness of his sympathy and love.

The man who is the centre of an endeared circle of enthusiastic friends, is counted thrice blest, while by communion he takes to his own bosom the joys of all around. But Jehovah is the centre of the universe, and can receive from every happy mind its full offering of confiding trust and love. He forever pours forth floods of light and joy, and receives back reflected rays of gladness from myriads of happy minds.

And there are some peculiar modes of enjoyment

to a benevolent mind, resulting from relations to a suffering and guilty race. What child is so dear as the one rescued from terrific danger? What pleasure so great, as saving from intolerable evils, those who, but for such efforts, would forever be lost? What efforts so earnest, or so delightful, as those for the deliverance, support, and consolation of the guilty, the sorrowful, and the helpless? It was "for the *joy* that was set before Him," that the cross was endured, and the shame despised; and it is those who are thus redeemed, over whom He will "rejoice with singing."

There are minds who feel their habits of selfishness to be so inveterate, that they have no strength of their own; there are minds of delicate and shrinking susceptibilities, who feel that they have cares and sorrows they can confide to no human ear; there are minds of timid and retiring feelings, who dare not seek the sympathy and notice of the busy world, and would sink with withering desolation, when they find they have nothing on which to lean for comfort and support. How delightful to the All Gracious Parent to receive their humble sighs, and grateful tears; to feel that he can strengthen the feeble amid the dreaded assaults of temptation; that he is sought as the consoling friend, by the spirit that dares speak to none but him; that he is an all-sufficient comforter and rest, where every earthly hope has ceased!

In conceiving of our Creator, as affected by the sorrows and guilt of a ruined race, we are liable to some false estimates. We take limited views, we

behold all the guilt, and all the misery, and as our minds are filled with the view ; we are agitated, and distressed, and in darkness. But the Infinite Mind, has plans and resources of which we can have no conceptions, and what is darkness to us, is light and wisdom to him. He can see the end from the beginning, and is, from every “evil still educating good.” He looks abroad on the vast universe, of which this earth and all its cares, is but a particle. He is the centre of knowledge, love, and joy, and is, and ever will be, “God over all, blessed forevermore.”

In conclusion let me entreat you to persevere in efforts to gain correct and consistent views of Him, whom I trust you are seeking in sincerity and truth. If you will only “set your heart to serve Him” and persevere in the use of all appropriate means, that *unreclining* state of mind which you lament, will pass away and by the promised aid of Him who worketh in us to will and to do, you will come into the glorious light and liberty of the children of God. May His peace, which passeth all understanding, keep your mind and heart now and evermore.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XVI.

MY DEAR SIR,

In my last I attempted to show that the service demanded of us by our Creator was a *reasonable* service, inasmuch as when he requires our supreme affection, he has at the same time disclosed all those characteristics and actions, which according to the very constitution of our minds, are fitted to awaken affection. I wish to present the reasonableness of the requisition in another light, by showing that this service demanded by our Maker; is the way to secure our own best and highest happiness. For we are made to be influenced in all things by the desire of happiness, and therefore it seems reasonable that our Maker, in prescribing his laws, should not interfere with this constitution of mind. I would therefore present this as a position that may be sustained; that the law of God, as summed up in the short sentence "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself," is the infallible directory to the highest happiness of which such minds as ours are capable; so that it is

another mode of saying "Be thou happy thyself, and make others so."

We may ascertain this, in the first place by examining the nature of mind and its various susceptibilities ; secondly, by the testimony of mankind in regard to their own experience ; and lastly, by the declaration of Revelation.

Let us first notice the several susceptibilities of happiness and suffering in the human mind, for the purpose of observing that a man who obeys the Divine law, and is continually increasing in its spirit, has the best security for obtaining every species of enjoyment, even in this life, of which mind is susceptible, and has the most certainty of avoiding the evils to which mankind are liable.

We may first notice our susceptibilities of pain and pleasure through the medium of the senses. It is the *temperate* enjoyment of such gratifications, which can alone secure the good for which they are designed. Any intemperance, or excess, brings some immediate or remote evil, which more than balances the good. But experience proves, that fear of consequences, is not a sufficient restraint to prevent mankind from excessive indulgence, and that some other powerful principle is needed. Such restraints continually protect a mind regulated by love to God, and engaged in the noble objects to which his service leads. He finds sources of gratification so much superior, that his attention is not easily drawn to grosser indulgencies, and the consciousness of the continual presence of the

Bountiful Giver of all good, is a restraint from every unlawful excess. Thus such a mind is less tempted, and at the same time has more power to resist temptation, than any being can command, who is undefended by the only true safeguard of virtue.

Obedience to the divine law also, most perfectly secures that happiness which results from the discovery of pleasing traits of character in intelligent minds, and from the exercise and reciprocation of affection. The amount of happiness gained from this source, always is proportioned to the character of the beings whom we love and admire, and from whom we seek the reciprocated boon. If they are felt to be unworthy the fulness of regard we would bestow, if they are found incapable of that return the heart desires, there is a restless longing for nobler objects of affection, which still remains unsatisfied. And if the mind gains transitory satisfaction from this source, yet how proverbially uncertain is human friendship, how easily blasted and turned to hate! And amid the fearful uncertainties and vicissitudes of life, how unsafe is the heart in the possession of its dearest earthly treasures, which at any moment may be removed, and leave to desolation the heart which once rejoiced.

But the mind that has raised its adoring affections to its Creator, is safe from unsatisfied desires, from disappointed trust, from desolating loss. In Him is found full perfection; one worthy our highest affections; one who can make a full return;

one who is ever with us, watching our sleeping pillow and guarding our daily path ; one who can appreciate every motive, understand every mental sacrifice, forgive every frailty, and strengthen every right desire. A mind thus sustained, though exposed to the storms and vicissitudes of life, can never lose its best and all-sufficient good. Whatever may betide, in the midst of disappointment and disaster, in the midst of trial and grief, still it can joyfully exult in the thought, "whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever !"

The pleasure derived from the exercise of the intellectual powers, can also be best secured by a mind that yields obedience to the divine law. The pleasure we derive from the acquisition of knowledge, very much depends upon the object we have in view in securing it. A person not regulated by the will of God, has all his objects and aims centering in this life, and these are all of a limited and contracted nature. In seeking these, he often finds his plans crossed, his motives misinterpreted, and his schemes perplexed. He finds the esteem and friendship of life transient, its honors contested amid the bitterness and hate of competitors, and so much of disappointment and painfulness mingled with the attainment of the most ardently desired objects, that the hour of possession is often the hour of sorrow and disgust. And as one bubble



after another bursts and flits away, he continually learns that his energies are employed in the pursuit of unsatisfying and unsubstantial good.

But he who enters into the plans and purposes of the Eternal Mind, who has devoted his powers to the object for which they were formed, who has consecrated all his energies to the great purpose of promoting the highest happiness of immortal minds, finds an object worthy his highest aims, and one which gives renewed interest to every species of knowledge. He has engaged in the glorious work, where God, and angels, and all holy beings are his associates, while sublime objects rise before him that meet his largest desires. He labors not for evanescent good, his toils are not to perish in a night, the fabrics of his glory crumble not to dust. The wreath of his success is immortal, the crown he wins unfading, the monuments he rears eternal !

And there are pleasures gained from the acquisition of knowledge, known only to such a mind. The discovery of wisdom, fitness, beauty and grandeur, in works of nature or of art, is one source of pleasure independently of any other connection. But if this discovery is the means of developing the character of some revered and beloved friend, how much is the enjoyment heightened. When we look on a beautiful picture, it is an object of great enjoyment, but if it is the work of our best beloved friend, how is this enjoyment heightened ! If we listen to strains of poetry and eloquence, our feelings are moved with pleasure, but

how much is this increased, when we regard them as the rich overflowings of the mind we love!

This heightened enjoyment, to be secured in the acquisition of knowledge, is peculiar to the mind whose highest affections are fixed upon God. All knowledge, either of matter or mind, and all specimens of taste, wisdom, and skill, are but exhibitions to the human mind, of the works of God, in their several relations and connections. Poetry is the presentation in musical language, either of the beauties of nature, or of the workings of mind, or of those curious analogies that exist between matter and mind; all devised and exhibited by our Creator. Philosophy is an exhibition of the wisdom and power of the Divine Architect, in forming and regulating the relations and movement of matter. Chemistry teaches us the imperceptible working of the same hand, in the minute atoms he has formed and arranged, with all their curious and subtil laws. Mathematics is an exhibition of the relations of matter, and of the powers of the human mind in developing truth. The laws of taste, as studied in the works of design, and of art, are exhibitions of the love of fitness, order, and beauty, in His mind, who has furnished the perfect models in the works of his hand.

Thus we might pass through all the varied paths of knowledge, and show that each, through its own pleasing variety, leads the mind to the contemplation of Him, "by whom all things are, and were created." A mind then, which has its affections raised to God, while it seeks and obtains all the

happiness gained by other minds in the pursuit of knowledge, adds to this, the fulness of grateful and admiring delight, as at every step is developed the goodness, wisdom and power of the glorious Being, who is the centre of its affections, and the source of its hopes.

The pleasure to be gained by the possession of power, is also open to the benevolent mind, while by principles of love and obedience, this sadly perverted susceptibility, is guarded and restrained. A desire for this pleasure is the occasion of pride, contention, ambition, envy and every baleful passion to unregulated minds. But one which is under the controlling influence of the Divine law, while it seeks this as a lawful good, which may thankfully be enjoyed, when not inconsistent with the general happiness, can readily resign it, when it is. Such a mind is not harassed by perplexing cares on this subject, for success is not the object of life, nor does disappointment destroy the source of true happiness. Thus while the benevolent mind secures the stimulus which this principle affords, in seeking all that is noble and of good report, it is protected from the dangers that await those, who engage in the pursuit, unregulated by the holy law of God.

The happiness secured by sympathy in the happiness of others, by being the cause of good to others, and by a course of conscious rectitude, as a matter of course, is best secured by a mind, which is living to fulfil the object of existence, and is employing every energy in promoting happiness

Thus by reasoning from the known laws of mind, we gain the position, that obedience to the Divine law, is the surest mode of securing every species of happiness, attainable in this state of existence.

To this may be added the evidence of the recorded experience of mankind. To exhibit this, some specific cases will be selected, and perhaps a fairer illustration cannot be presented than the contrasted records of two youthful personages who have made the most distinguished figure in the Christian, and in the literary world; Henry Martyn, the missionary, and Lord Byron the poet.

The first was richly endowed with ardent feelings, keen susceptibilities, and superior intellect. He was the object of many affections, and in the principal University of Great Britain, won the highest honors, both in classic literature, and mathematical science. He was flattered, caressed, and admired; the road of fame and honor, lay open before him, and the brightest hopes of youth, seemed ready to be realized. But the hour came when he looked upon a lost and guilty world, in the light of eternity; when he realized the full meaning of the sacrifice of our incarnate God; when he assumed his obligations to become a fellow worker in redeeming a guilty world from the dominion of selfishness, and all its future woes. "The love of God constrained him;" and without a murmur, for wretched beings, on a distant shore, whom he never saw, of whom he knew nothing but that they were miserable and guilty, he relinquish-

ed the wreath of fame, forsook the path of worldly honor, severed the ties of kindred, and gave up friends, country and home. With every nerve throbbing in anguish at the sacrifice, he went forth alone, to degraded heathen society, to solitude and privation, to weariness and painfulness, and to all the trials of missionary life.

He spent his days in teaching the guilty and degraded, the way of pardon and peace. He lived to write the law of his God in the wide spread character of the Persian nation, and to place a copy in the hands of its king. He lived to contend with the chief Moullahs of Mahomet in the mosques of Shiraz, and to kindle a flame in Persia, more undying than its fabled fires. He lived to endure rebuke and scorn, to toil and suffer in a fervid clime, to drag his weary steps over burning sands, with the daily dying hope, that at last he might be laid to rest among his kindred, and on his native shore. Yet even this last earthly hope was not attained, for after spending all his youth in ceaseless labors for the good of others, at the early age of thirty-two, he was laid in an unknown and foreign grave.

He died *alone*—a stranger in a strange land—with no friendly form around to sympathize and soothe. “*Compositus est paucioribus lachrymis.*” Yet this was the last record of his dying hand: “I sat in the orchard and thought with sweet comfort and peace of my God! in solitude, my company! my friend! my comforter!”

And in reviewing the record of his short, yet

blessed life, even if we forget the exulting joy with which such a benevolent spirit must welcome to heaven the thousands he toiled to redeem ; if we look only at his years of self-denying trial, where were accumulated all the sufferings he was ever to feel, we can find more evidence of *true happiness* than is to be found in the records of the youthful poet, who was gifted with every susceptibility of happiness, who spent his days in search of selfish enjoyment, who had every source of earthly bliss laid open, and drank to the very dregs.

His remains present one of the most mournful exhibitions of a noble mind in all the wide chaos of ruin and disorder. He also, was naturally endowed with overflowing affections, keen sensibilities, quick conceptions, and a sense of moral rectitude. He had all the constituents of a mind of first rate order. But he passed through existence amid the wildest disorder of a ruined spirit. His mind seemed utterly unbalanced, teeming with rich thoughts and overbearing impulses, the sport of the strangest fancies, and the strongest passions ; bound down by no habit, restrained by no principle ; a singular combination of great conceptions and fantastic caprices, of manly dignity and childish folly, of noble feeling and babyish weakness.

The lord of Newstead Abbey—the heir of a boasted line of ancestry—a peer of the realm—the pride of the social circle—the leading star of poesy—the hero of Greece—the wonder of the gaping world, can now be followed to his secret haunts. And there the veriest child of the nurse-

ry might be amused at some of his silly weaknesses and ridiculous conceits. Distressed about the cut of a collar, fuming at the color of his dress, intensely anxious about the whiteness of his hands, deeply engrossed with monkeys and dogs, and flying about from one whim to another, with a reckless earnestness as ludicrous as it is disgusting.

At times this boasted hero and genius, seemed nought but an overgrown child, that had broken its leading strings and overmastered its nurses. At other times he is beheld in all the rounds of dissipation and the haunts of vice, occasionally filling up his leisure in recording and disseminating the disgusting minutiae of his weakness and shame, and with an effrontery and stupidity equalled only by that of the friend who retails them to the insulted world. Again we behold him philosophizing like a sage, and moralizing like a Christian; while often from his bosom bursts forth the repinings of a wounded spirit. He sometimes seemed to gaze upon his own mind with wonder, to watch its disordered powers with curious inquiry, to touch its complaining strings, and start at the response; while often with maddening sweep he shook every chord, and sent forth its deep wailings to entrance a wondering world.

Both Henry Martyn and Lord Byron shared the sorrows of life, and their records teach the different workings of the Christian and the worldly mind. Byron lost his mother, and when urged not to give way to sorrow, he burst into an agony of grief, saying, "I had but *one* friend in the world,

and now she is gone !” On the death of some of his early friends, he thus writes : “ My friends fall around me, and I shall be left a lonely tree before I am withered. *I have no resource but my own reflections*, and they present no prospect here or hereafter, except the selfish satisfaction of surviving my betters. I am indeed most wretched !”

And thus Henry Martyn mourns the loss of one most dear. “ Can it be that she has been lying so many months in the cold grave ! Would that I could always remember it, or always forget it ; but to think a moment on other things, and then feel the remembrance of it come, as if for the first time, rends my heart asunder. O my gracious God, what should I do without Thee ! But now thou art manifesting thyself as ‘ the God of all consolation.’ Never was I so near thee. There is nothing in the world for which I could wish to live, except because it may please God to appoint me some work to do. O thou incomprehensibly glorious Savior, what hast thou done to alleviate the sorrows of life !”

It is recorded of Byron, that in society he generally appeared humorous and prankish ; yet when rallied on his melancholy turn of writing, his constant answer was, that though thus merry and full of laughter, he was at heart one of the most miserable wretches in existence. And thus he writes : “ Why at the very height of desire and human pleasure, worldly, amorous, ambitious, or even avaricious, does there mingle a certain sense of



doubt and sorrow—a fear of what is to come—a doubt of what is. If it were not for Hope what would the future be—a hell ! As for the past what predominates in memory—hopes baffled ! From whatever place we commence we know *where it must all end*. And yet what good is there in knowing it ? It does not make men wiser or better. If I were to live over again, I do not know what I would change in my life, unless it were for—*not to have lived at all*. All history, and experience, and the rest teach us, that good and evil are pretty equally balanced in this existence, and that what is *most* to be desired is an *easy passage out of it*. What can it give us but years, and these have *little of good but their ending*.”

And thus Martyn writes : “ I am happier here in this remote land, where I seldom hear what happens in the world, than I was in England, where there are so many calls to look at things that are seen. The precious *Word* is now my only study, by means of translations. Time flows on with great rapidity. It seems as if life would all be gone before any thing is done. I sometimes rejoice that I am but twenty-seven, and that unless God should ordain it otherwise, I may double this number in constant and successful labor. But I shall not cease from my happiness and scarcely from my labor, by passing into the other world.”

And thus they make their records at anniversaries, when the mind is called to review life and its labors. Thus Byron writes : “ At twelve o'clock I shall have completed thirty-three years ! I go to

my bed with a heaviness of heart at having lived so long and to so little purpose. It is now three minutes past twelve, and I am thirty-three !

Eheu fugaces, Posthume, Posthume,  
Labuntur anni;

But I do not regret them so much for what I have done, as for what I *might* have done."

And thus Martyn: "I like to find myself employed usefully, in a way I did not expect or foresee. The coming year is to be a perilous one, but my life is of little consequence, whether I finish the Persian New Testament or not. I look back with pity on myself, when I attached so much importance to my life and labors. The more I see of my own works, the more I am ashamed of them, for coarseness and clumsiness mar all the works of man. I am sick when I look at the wisdom of man, but am relieved by reflecting, that we have a city whose builder and maker is God. The least of *his* works is refreshing. A dried leaf, or a straw, make me feel *in good company*, and complacency and admiration take the place of disgust. What a momentary duration is the life of man ! "*Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum,*" may be affirmed of the river ; but men pass away as soon as they begin to exist. Well, let the moments pass !"

" They waft us sooner o'er  
This life's tempestuous sea,  
Soon we shall reach the blissful shore  
Of blest eternity !"

Such was the experience of those who in youth

completed their course. The poet has well described his own career :

“ A wandering mass of shapeless flame,  
A pathless comet and a curse,  
The menace of the universe;  
Still rolling on with innate force,  
Without a sphere, without a course,  
A bright deformity on high,  
The monster of the upper sky !”

In holy writ we read of those who are “ raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame ; *wandering stars* to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” The lips of man may not apply these terrific words to any whose doom is yet to be disclosed ; but there is a passage which none can fear to apply. “ Those that are wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness, as stars forever and ever !”

To these youthful witnessess may be added the testimony of two who had fulfilled their years. The first was the polished, the witty, the elegant and admired Earl of Chesterfield, who tried every source of earthly enjoyment, and at the end makes this acknowledgment : “ I have seen,” says he, “ the silly rounds of business and of pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is, in truth, very low. Whereas those that have not experienced, always overrate them. They only see

their gay outside, and are dazzled at the glare. But I have been behind the scenes. I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes which exhibit and move the gaudy machines ; and I have seen and smelt the tallow candles which illuminate the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of the ignorant audience. When I reflect on what I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry of bustle and pleasure of the world, had any reality ; but I look upon all that is passing as one of those romantic dreams, which opium commonly occasions ; and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose, for the sake of the fugitive dream. Shall I tell you that I bear this melancholy situation with that meritorious constancy and resignation, which most people boast of ? No, for I really cannot help it. I bear it, because I *must* bear it, whether I will or no ! I think of nothing but killing time the best way I can, now that he is become my enemy. It is my resolution to *sleep in the carriage* during the remainder of the journey of life."

The other personage was Paul, the Aged. For Christ and the redemption of those for whom he died, he "suffered the loss of all things;" and this is the record of his course ; "in labors abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths, oft ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and

painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,—and that which cometh daily upon me, the care of all the churches. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our *light* affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal.” And as the time drew near when he was to be “offered up,” and he looked back on the past course of his life, these are his words of triumphant exultation: “I have fought a *good* fight! I have finished my course! I have kept the faith! henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which Christ, the righteous judge shall give!”

To this testimony of experience, may be added that of Scripture. “Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he! The fear of the Lord, *that is wisdom*, and to depart from evil is understanding. Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to her. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Keep sound wisdom, so shall it be life to thy soul. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and when thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid, yea, thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall

be sweet." And thus the Redeemer invites to his service: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls!"

In reflecting on the topics I have suggested, do you ask, why, if Christians have such sources of high enjoyment, do they not appear, as a class, happier than other men. Ah, my dear sir, how few attain such elevated piety as is here described! It is because Christians are so inconsistent, so worldly, so led about by temptations, that they cannot reach that higher place, of "calm and serene air." Beside this, some of the best Christians in the world, have such incorrect intellectual views of religious truth and duty, that they suffer more, and enjoy far less than they would, had they more correct notions.

But after all, Christians do enjoy more in this life than other men. The happiest persons *by far*, that I have ever known, were the most intelligent, consistent and devoted Christians. And even those who enjoy the least, I believe would tell you, that they would not exchange their present measure of happiness, for that which they received before they commenced their christian life.

They would tell you that their happiness came from sources different from worldly enjoyments, and was mingled with anxieties and sorrows that were different; but that on the whole, the balance was in favor of religion, as tending to promote our

best happiness even in this life. And I believe as Christians advance in consistent views of religious truth and duty, and gain in a spirit of true devotedness to God, and the best interests of their fellow men, it will become more and more apparent to the world, that the ways of true wisdom are indeed "pleasantness and peace."

With sincere desires that you may find these happy ways, and not only walk in them yourself, but guide and influence multitudes to do the same, I remain as ever,

Your friend, &c.

## LETTER XVII.

(TO ANOTHER PERSON.)

MY DEAR SIR,

It seems to me that the difficulties you suggest, when I urge you to examine for yourself, and come to some definite result in regard to Unitarian doctrines, appear to you of much greater magnitude than the reality warrants. I do not think "it is necessary to explore tomes of angry controversy, nor to examine disputed passages in Greek and Hebrew, nor to dive into all the profoundes of metaphysics, nor to trace back history and the fathers to the days of the apostles." I think all the plausibility and success of Unitarianism may be resolved into two general causes, of which you can judge without all this research. The first is, *unfairness in argument* ; and the second is, *a violation of the laws of evidence, in regard to the interpretation of language.*

When I charge unfairness of argument, I do not intend to impeach motives, or to imply that it is knowingly and wilfully perpetrated. There are many cases in which men reason incorrectly and unfairly, without at all knowing or intending it ; I



leave motives and intentions out of the question, and only aim to establish the fact.

As both Unitarians and their opponents acknowledge the Bible as the source of their faith, the whole controversy turns on the interpretation of language. The chief difficulties encountered here, arise from this fact, that a great part of the words and expressions of language have two or more uses, so that the question always must arise, as to which of the several meanings that are attached to the same expression in its different uses, is to be adopted as the true one.

Now the peculiarity which distinguishes Unitarians from all other sects is the denial of the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost. It is this point, therefore, which I will select to exhibit what I deem the unfairness of argument which the defence of Unitarianism always has involved.

Now almost the whole matter turns on the use of the terms *one*, *only*, *alone*, and similar terms denoting *unity*; and I will premise, therefore, with an exhibition of the use and signification of such terms.

*Unity or oneness* means, that which gives no cause or ground of distinction into two. Thus our minds are said to be one and indivisible, because there is no foundation for any distinction that makes two. All the emotions, thoughts, and acts of choice, pertain, so far as we can perceive, to the same thing. We have no proof that there are *two* thinking, feeling and acting agents in our bodies, and therefore as there is no foundation for a distinction into two, we say there is *one*. The term *one*, or *unity*, is

the same as saying "not two or more;" and saying that "one is two" in the *same* sense, is saying that existences are "two and not two," which is an exact contradiction, inconceivable, and therefore beyond the *possibility* of belief; for we cannot believe that of which we cannot even conceive. Whenever the term *one*, then, is used, it means that *in the particular respect* to which it is applied, there is no foundation for distinction into two or more. Thus when a man and his wife are declared *one*, it signifies that in certain respects there is no foundation for considering them two. When an assembly is said to have "only one mind," it means that in a certain respect there is no foundation for considering them as two. When an army is said to be "one body," it means that though composed of thousands of bodies, there is one respect in which they cannot be considered as *two*. From these illustrations it appears that all existences can be regarded as one in some respects, and as two or more, in other respects; and that when a thing is said to be *one*, it signifies that in some respects there is no foundation for considering it as two.

Now both sides agree that it is common to apply the term *one* to things which in some respects are plural, while in others there is a unity. Both agree that when the term *one* is used, the question always must arise, "in what respect is there unity?" When, for example, Christ says, "I and my Father are one," both agree that there is a sense in which they are one, and a sense in which they are two, and not one.

In regard to the term *God* also they both agree that two distinct persons are called God ; namely, Jesus Christ, and the being styled in distinction “the Father.” Both agree that the term god is applied to beings who are *men*. Thus Moses is called a god to Pharaoh, and magistrates are called gods to those whom they govern. Both agree that Jesus Christ is in some respects God, so that in those respects, it is proper to call him God, and that in other respects he is a man, and is called a man.

Now there is a sense in which *one* is a contradiction to two or more. For example, when we say our own mind is *one* mind, it would be a contradiction to say it was *two* minds, in that sense in which we call it one mind. But when we speak of a number of minds who think and feel alike, although there are many of them, and in one sense it is absurd to call them one mind, yet in another sense it is proper and in common use to say, “they are all one mind,” or “but one mind animates them,” meaning that in some respects they are one, that is, in some respects there is no foundation for regarding them as two or more.

The question then is this ; when Jesus Christ and the Father are called *one*, is it that oneness which we attribute to our own minds, and which makes it absurd and a contradiction to call them two ? Now both Unitarians and Trinitarians agree here also. Trinitarians expressly and in all cases say that they do not attribute that oneness to the Father and the Son which makes it an absurdity

and a contradiction to call them two. They say they regard them as two in one sense, and one in another sense, that they never regard them as one in the same sense in which they regard them as two.

It appears, then, that Unitarians and Trinitarians agree thus far, that both allow two uses to the term *one*; that both allow that this term is applied to two beings; the Father and the Son; and that both say that this oneness is not the unity which we predicate of our own minds, which makes it an absurdity to say that in this same respect they are two.

What, then, are the respects in which they differ? They differ in this. The Trinitarian says that in the Bible there is a person called the Father, to whom the names of God, Lord, and Jehovah are given, to whom the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and eternal existence are ascribed, and who is presented as the object of love, worship and obedience.

That there is another person called the Son, to whom the names of God, Lord, and Jehovah are given, to whom the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and eternal existence are ascribed, and who is presented as the object of love, worship and obedience.

And that there is a third divine person called the Holy Ghost, to whom these same names, attributes and claims are given. And inasmuch as each of these have the same names, attributes and claims, they are each to be regarded as distinct di-

vine persons, to whom equal and the same worship, reverence, and obedience belong. They say also that there are passages in the Bible that teach that there is "but one God," that there is "but one Jehovah," that "there is one Lord alone," and therefore there are *some respects* in which these three divine persons are *one*, which make it proper to call them one God; just as when there is a number of separate, distinct human minds, there is a sense in which it is proper to say, "there is but one mind among them all."

On the contrary, the Unitarians say that there is one divine person called "the Father," to whom the names of God, Lord, and Jehovah, are given, to whom the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and eternity are ascribed, and who is presented as the object of love, worship, and obedience; that there is another being called Jesus Christ, to whom the names of God, Lord, and Jehovah are ascribed, to whom the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and eternity are ascribed, and who is presented as an object of love, worship, and obedience. But they claim that the names when given to Jesus Christ are used in a different sense from what they are when given to the Father; that the attributes are ascribed to him in a different sense, and that the love, worship and obedience claimed, is different from that claimed for the Father. They say that when the Father is called God and Lord, it signifies one supreme and only self-existent mind; but that when applied to Christ, they have that secondary meaning which was given when Moses was

called "a god to Pharaoh," and when rulers are called "gods" to their subjects; that when the divine attributes of the Father are ascribed to the Son, they are to be regarded as limited and derived, just as when the ambassador of a monarch is regarded as representing his sovereign in certain powers and dignities, which are not inherent in his own person, but which are regarded as belonging to him, in his representative capacity; that when worship and obedience are demanded, they are to be limited in the same way, and to be rendered to him, not as his own due, but as due to him as an ambassador and teacher sent by the Sovereign of the universe.

Now the whole question turns, if managed fairly and correctly, simply on those points where the two parties differ; namely, "the sense in which the names, attributes and claims of deity are ascribed to Jesus Christ."

There is no dispute about the fact that these names, attributes and claims are ascribed to him; for though there is some dispute as to the *number of times*, there is none as to the *fact* that all are in fact allowed *somewhere* in the Bible.

Of course it is the business of the Trinitarian to bring evidence that these expressions have the same meaning, when applied to Jesus Christ, as they do when applied to the Father; and it is the business of the Unitarian to bring evidence that they are not used in this, but in another sense.

I am now prepared to point out the unfairness in argument, universally found in defences of Unitarianism.

You will find that when the term *one* is used in such passages as these, there is "one God," there is "one Jehovah," there is "only one Lord," that they *assume without proof*, that this unity is such a unity as we ascribe to our own minds; a unity which makes it a contradiction to say that there is more than one divine person who has the attributes and claims which they allow to the Father. I say they assume it; for they do not prove it, or even attempt it. I feel confident, from examination, that you will find no single instance in which any defence of Unitarianism meets this first claim of fairness and equity, that they should *prove* the point upon which the whole controversy turns. But they go still farther than this in unfairness; they not only assume their notion of unity without proof, but they always talk and write just as if Trinitarians acknowledged the truth of this, their main position, which in fact Trinitarians always deny. Trinitarians always deny, in all cases, that they believe in a unity of divine persons which is contradictory to a trinity; they claim to believe that there is a unity in some respect, and a trinity in other respects, and that there is not a unity in the respect in which there is a trinity. They say just as Unitarians do, there is a sense in which Christ and the Father are one, and there is a sense in which they are two and not one. Unitarians say that when the term "there is only one God" is used, the unity is meant which we predicate of our own minds, which makes it absurd to say that two divine persons are one God. Trinitarians deny this kind of unity, and say that

there is a foundation for calling these two equally divine persons one God, which does not involve a contradiction, and that it is not that sense in which they are three, that they are to be called one. They maintain that they are one in a sense which allows the existence of three divine persons, each possessing eternal underived existence, creative power, omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, and that each is a proper object of love, worship and obedience.

Now Unitarians will reason fairly, when in the first place they will allow to their opponents the sentiments which they really hold, viz. that they believe in a unity which is not that which Unitarians hold to, and therefore, not contradictory to the existence of three divine persons, each possessing all the attributes they allow to the Father. And then they will reason fairly in the other respect, when they will bring proof that the unity they themselves hold to, is the one which the Bible teaches, and which is so inconsistent with the Trinity as to make it an absurdity.

It will not be right or fair in me, however, not to allow the difficulties on this subject that really exist, and in doing it, you will perceive where it is that the chief strength and plausibility of Unitarianism is found. Trinitarians, not content with a ground which they can safely hold and avoid all difficulties, have embarrassed themselves, and given force to the arguments of those who differ from them, by attempting to show *what it is* in which the divine unity consists, and how this



unity which they describe, can be made consistent with their views of a Trinity.

You will find Trinitarians divided into three classes on this subject. The first class is that which includes the great body of common Christians, who do not speculate or enter into the philosophy of religion. They find that in the Bible the Father is called *God, Lord and Jehovah*, that he has the attributes of Deity given him, and that he is presented as the object of love, worship and obedience, and so they take the thing just as it reads in their Bible, and render to him these names, attributes and rights.

They find Jesus Christ has all these names, attributes and rights ascribed to him, they take the matter just as it reads, and render to him these names, attributes and rights. And so of the Holy Ghost.

They find the passages that say there is "but one God." They know that the term one has different uses, that the same persons and things are two in one sense and one in another. They therefore, with the common sense that stands as the guardian of Holy Writ, say that there are Three divine, eternal, self-existent persons, each of which has the same names and attributes as the others, and that there are *some respects* in which they are one God.

But if the question is asked, in what respects are they one God, *how*, if they are three in the respects in which you regard them as three, can they be

properly called one God? They simply reply to this, “ we do not know, we know that the Bible teaches both the views we hold; the Trinity and the Unity; we know that things and beings can be one in some respects, and three in other respects, without absurdity or contradiction. We hold that this is the case in regard to the Trinity. We do not pretend to say in what respects there is a unity, and no one can say, therefore, that we hold to a unity which is contradictory to our views of the Trinity.

Another class of Trinitarians say that there are these three Divine Persons, to whom equally and alike, pertain all the attributes and rights that are ascribed by Unitarians to the Father; that each of these is God, the one as much as the other; that they are exactly alike in being self-existent; from eternity, in each being an omnipresent spirit, in each having every possible perfection, and in having a perfect *similarity*, called also *oneness*, in knowledge, in feelings, in desires, and in choice; that they are so perfectly similar and alike in every conceivable respect, that until one of them became incarnate, there was no possible ground for making any distinction, which human minds could understand, so that, though to these Divine Persons themselves, there was ground for distinction into different persons, yet so far as human beings could conceive or understand, there was no such ground, and therefore to them in all respects here was *but one God*; that all the distinction now revealed, is that which relates to the redemption of mankind. We

now can conceive of one as becoming incarnate, when the others did not, and of the Father and the Spirit as each doing something in promoting this work, or in relation to Jesus Christ, which the other did not do. This perfect similarity in thought, feeling, desire, knowledge and purpose, it is maintained, is foundation sufficient to make it proper, and in agreement with the ordinary use of language, to call them one God.

To meet fairly those who explain the Unity thus, it must be shown, either that the Bible gives no authority for ascribing such entire similarity in nature and character to the three Divine Persons, or else that such a unity is not a sufficient ground to make it proper to call them *one* God, but is a violation of the laws of language. Calling it Tritheism is neither proof nor argument.

This third class of Trinitarians are those who explain the Unity so that I never could perceive wherein they differ from Unitarians, in describing a Unity that is contradictory to a Trinity. When I read their statements, they always convey an impression of a Unity in the divine persons, that makes the Trinity they hold, a contradiction. They deny this, but in explaining how it is *not* contradictory, there is so much that is unintelligible to me, that I cannot understand them. But this much I always perceive, that they believe there is one sense in which there are three divine, eternal, self-existent persons, each possessing all the attributes ascribed to the Father, and yet that there is another sense in which there is a unity, and that

they consider that this unity is not the one which Unitarians hold, and which makes a Trinity absurd. This they all maintain, and if in attempting to exhibit the *philosophy* of their doctrine, they contradict the doctrine itself, it is very unfair to charge them with holding what they expressly and always deny.

No Trinitarians ever allow that they hold to a unity of persons, that is such a unity as we predicate of our own minds, and which makes the doctrine of the Trinity an absurdity. They all say, that they hold the Trinity to exist in certain respects, and the unity to exist in certain other respects, which are not contradictory.

Now I am ready to point out the unfairness of Unitarian arguments. I ask you to examine for yourself. Go to the fairest, most intelligent and best informed Unitarian you know, and ask him for the best argument against Trinitarianism, the one he deems *unanswerable*, and see if you will not find the following exhibition of unfairness.

First, *assuming* that the Unitarian sense of unity is the correct one without proof. Secondly, assuming that Trinitarians allow the same sense to the word. And then they go on to exhibit the methods employed by some few Trinitarians, who, in explaining their *philosophy*, contradict their *doctrine*. If you can show me a single Unitarian writer who is not guilty of this unfairness, I shall see something new to me.

Now it seems to me, that plain, common-sense people, who have no theories and no philosophy

on the subject, are much more fair, and much more philosophical in interpreting language, than Unitarians. They say that Jesus Christ and the Father both are called God, and both have the attributes of God, and both are worshipped as God, and that therefore, both *are* God, and both should be worshipped as God. And when they read the texts, "there is only one God," and are asked *how* there are two persons called God, and yet it is said there is only one God, they answer, they do not know *how* it is, but they believe it is so, because they find it in the Bible. If they understood the language of philosophy and philology, they might say, it is a law of interpretation, that when two senses may be given to a word, that sense is to be taken as the true one, which makes a writer consistent with himself, and does not contradict his other declarations; and therefore as it is common to use the term *one* to signify unity, in some respects, when there is plurality in other respects, it is proper to interpret it thus, in this case, and to say that the Father and the Son and Spirit are three in some respects, and one in other respects; so that it is proper and in agreement with the use of language to call them one God.

But without at all questioning the honesty of intention in Unitarian writers, I would ask you if you think it is really fair, to assume that the Unitarian sense of the term *one* is the right one without proof; or if it is fair to assume that Trinitarians acknowledge this use of the term as the true one, when they always and universally deny it; or if it

is fair to take the mode of explaining their philosophical *theories*, employed by *some* Trinitarians, as an exhibition of *doctrines* as held by the whole body. The whole body hold to the fact that there are three Divine Persons, to whom the same names, attributes, and honors belong ; and that there are *some respects* in which there is such a unity as makes it proper to call them one God. This is the doctrine or *fact*, held by all Trinitarians. But all Trinitarians do not attempt to show in what respects there is a unity, nor to show that the unity which exists, is consistent with the existence of such a Trinity as they hold. Is it fair then to take the theories and speculations of those who do attempt this, as an exhibition of the *doctrine* held by all Trinitarians ?

Supposing that some Trinitarians, in attempting to show what their notions are of the unity, have described, (and without seeming to know it,) a unity, such as Unitarians claim ; a unity that is contradictory to the doctrine of the Trinity ; is it fair or right to say, that all Trinitarians hold to such a unity, when some expressly disclaim it, and when the very men who involve themselves in this embarrassment, expressly claim that they do not hold to a unity that is contradictory to their ideas of Trinity, and are endeavoring to show it ? It seems to me that this is a case where it is very easy to distinguish between a *doctrine* or *fact* that is believed, and a philosophical theory that attempts to explain that fact. Trinitarians have no difficulty in the *doctrine* they hold ; all their embarrassments

have arisen from the various theories that have been invented to explain the *philosophy* of the doctrine. That there are three Divine Persons, each having all the attributes ascribed to the Father, while at the same time they are one in certain respects, so that it is proper, according to the right use of language, to call them *one God*, is a proposition neither difficult to comprehend, nor mysterious, nor absurd. A mystery is a fact that is not known or understood. The mystery about the Trinity is not in the doctrine itself, but in that part connected with it, which is not and cannot be known or understood, viz. *all* those particulars in which the *unity* of the three divine persons consists. And the fog and mysticism which has been cast about this subject, is made by attempts at this point, to be wise “above what is written.” Some of the particulars that constitute the divine unity *are* revealed, for we know that they are one in feelings, purposes, and interests; but in how many other respects they are one, which are not expressly and clearly revealed, it is not for us to know, and surely it is unwise to inquire.

I will point out one other instance of unfairness of the same kind, because it relates to the other distinctive peculiarity of Unitarianism, the divine and human nature of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Here again it is important, first, to notice wherein Unitarians and Trinitarians agree.

They both allow that Jesus Christ was God, in

some respects, and that he was man in some respects, while he was *not* man in other respects. The Unitarian says he was God in those respects in which Moses was a god to Pharaoh, and rulers are gods to their subjects, though he was not God in those respects in which God the Father, as they claim, is different from all others. They say that he was a man in these respects ; that he was born of woman, and was subject to all the changes and sufferings and trials of humanity ; but he was not a man in this respect, that he had a *super-angelic* nature, was free from all sin, existed before he came into this world, and possessed powers and attributes, either inherent or delegated, that do not belong to human minds.

Trinitarians, on the contrary, say that he was God in the same sense, and in all respects, in which the Father is God ; that he was man in this respect, that he was born of woman, was subject to all the changes, sufferings and trials, of humanity ; but that he was not a man in this respect, that he had a *Divine* nature, was free from all sin, and had powers and attributes that do not belong to human minds.

Now the unfairness which I ask you to notice is this. Take any Unitarian writer on this subject, and they quote all the texts that show that Christ was a man, as proof that he was not God, just as if it was a conceded point that if he is a man, he cannot at the same time be any thing superior to a man. And then they go on acknowledging his super-human character, and never seem to notice



or to know, that they allow the same fact, which either explains and removes all difficulties in the views they condemn, or else involves themselves in the same. For they allow the general principle that a being can be a man in some respects, so that it is proper to call him a man ; and God in other respects, so that it is proper to call him God, and so long as they allow this, it is not fair to bring up texts that show he is a man, to disprove the orthodox view of his *divine* nature, when they would just as much disprove their own ideas of his *super-human* nature. For it is just as proper to call him God and man, as to call him a super-angelic being and a man.

Now I ask you to examine Unitarian writers on this point, and see if they are not guilty of the unfairness of urging difficulties as fatal to the views of Trinitarians, which are just the same, and just as fatal to their own system.

It seems to me that Trinitarians have, in this matter also, as well as in the general question, made themselves difficulties in regard to a doctrine, which really belong only to the theories invented to explain the *philosophy* of the doctrine. The doctrine or fact revealed is simply this, that Jesus Christ has the attributes which are ascribed to the Father, and that he became incarnate, and so took upon himself the state and relations and peculiarities of a man, that it is proper to call him a man. He was a man in those respects which are included under the term man. He was born of woman, had a human body and a rational and immortal

spirit, was subject to all the changes and relations of humanity, and died as men die. What *more* he had than this, is no part of the question. If he had what constitutes it proper to call any being a man, he *was* a man, however much he may have been besides. Just as every man has all that constitutes any being an *animal*, and yet has other properties that in addition constitute him a *man*.

Now there are three classes on this point, as well as in regard to the theories about the Trinity among Trinitarians. The first class includes all common minds that do not theorise or speculate about the philosophy of religion. They take the simple facts revealed, viz. that Jesus Christ has all the attributes of God, the same as the Father has ; and therefore he is God, the same as the Father is. That he also has the attributes and name of a man ascribed to him in the Bible, and therefore he is a man. And they stop here. If they are urged to tell how this is so, they simply reply, we do not know, the Bible tells us it is so, and therefore we believe it is so.

There is another class who attempt to explain the philosophy of the doctrine thus. They say the Divine Mind of our Savior became incarnate, and in such a way that, while connected with a body, the *exercise* of his divine attributes was limited and his glory thus obscured ; that while in this state of humiliation, it was proper to ascribe to him all the attributes of Deity, because he *really possessed them all*, though during his state of humiliation, to a greater or less extent they were not in exercise ;

that at the same time he was a man, because he had those peculiarities which entitle a being to that name—that he was born of woman, suffered the ills and changes of humanity, and died as men die. Not, (as Unitarians seem to imagine, who shudder when they speak of it, as if Trinitarians believed it,) that his divine nature was destroyed ; but that it was released from the clay which limited the exercise of infinite powers and faculties.

The third and last class say, that when the Divine Mind became incarnate, it was in some mysterious way united with a human soul, as one person, and that when divine attributes are ascribed to Jesus Christ, they are predicated of his divine nature, and that when human attributes are ascribed to him, they are predicated of his human nature.

Now you will find that all the embarrassments of Trinitarians have resulted from these theories, which are intended to exhibit the *quo modo* of a doctrine, and not to the doctrine itself. Those who are satisfied *without a theory*, have no difficulties. They simply say, we do not know *how* it is ; we only know that the Bible says it is so, and nobody can prove that it is not so. Nobody can prove that Christ did not possess all the attributes that make it proper to call him God, in the same sense that the Father is God, nor that he did not, at the same time, possess attributes that make it proper to call him a man.

For my own part, I think all christian minds might wisely and safely, stop here ; the chief use

of philosophical theories, is to meet the difficulties of sceptical men, who will not trust the Bible in this way. In such cases, it is sometimes useful to be able to show that there is a way in which we can see how the thing *may be*, so that it is not *necessary* to allow contradictions and absurdities in the Bible. For this purpose I think some theories are better than others, and feel myself at liberty to select such as seem the most rational and consistent; but I never incorporate them into my system as articles of *revealed truth*, but place them where they belong, as the philosophical deductions of human minds. And if this distinction had always been preserved, the church of Christ would have been saved from many hurtful controversies.

Now it would seem from what has been said, that the Unitarian theories have just exactly the same difficulties to meet as the Trinitarian. They have to explain the difficulty of saying that there are more Gods than one in one sense, and only one God in another sense. They have to explain the difficulty of saying that Christ is God in one respect, and in other respects a man. In addition to this, they have the difficult task of altering the most obvious and natural sense of all those passages, which ascribe the names and attributes and rights of the Divinity to Jesus Christ.

It is in doing this that Unitarians exhibit the second particular I am attempting to show, viz: "a violation of the laws of evidence in regard to the interpretation of language."

The great law of evidence, that we are to take

to be truth that which has the *balance of evidence* in its favor, is as fundamental and as indispensable in the interpretation of language, as it is in the common and practical affairs of life. We all know that almost every expression of language has more than one meaning ; it may be a literal, it may be a figurative sense ; or it may be one of several literal uses. For example, when we find such a sentence as this, “ He took the *heads* ;” it may mean the heads of a discourse, or the heads of some animals, or the heads of nails, or the principal officers of the departments of government ; and we can determine the true meaning, only by examining the subject of discourse, and finding which of these meaning has the most evidence in its favor, and involves the fewest difficulties. If every man is at liberty to show that expressions have various senses, and then choose whichever he pleases, no laws, or contracts, or writings of any kind could be relied on for a moment.

Now there are certain rules of interpretation which every man of common sense uses, which enable him when he reads his newspaper, for example, to determine what parts are true, and what parts are fictitious, and what is literal, and what is figurative, and what is poetry, and what is prose. Though such men never have these rules drawn up into regular forms for use, they always employ them, and find little difficulty in gaining the true meaning of writings, so far as all important and practical purposes are concerned. The Bible is a book written in the language of men, and is there-

fore to be interpreted by the same rules as all other writings.

To these positions you will readily yield assent, and I will now point out some of the particulars in which Unitarians violate the law of evidence, and the rules of interpretation. I shall not present many specific cases, to illustrate, but rather ask you to examine the matter for yourself, and then judge whether I am not correct. Take, as one instance, some *disputed readings*, where the Unitarian claims that a text in the original has a certain reading, and the Trinitarian claims that it has a different one. Now the way to settle this matter properly, is to take that reading which has the *balance of evidence* in its favor. This evidence always depends on the *number* and the *value* of manuscripts. The reading which has the most manuscripts, and the most valuable manuscripts in its favor, is the true reading. Of course we have only to inquire how many manuscripts and of what sort are for one side, and what for the other, and then take that to be the right, which has *the most* in its favor. Unitarian and Trinitarian critics do not dispute about the question of which manuscripts are on each side. The Trinitarian says, the greatest number of manuscripts, and the most valuable are in favor of a certain reading, therefore it is the true reading. But usually the Unitarian first assumes that his notion of the unity of God which makes the Trinity absurd, is the true one; and then shows that the texts are *capable* of the Unitarian reading, and then shows that

*some* manuscripts are in favor of it, then claims (that as the Trinity is an absurdity,) the reading that is supported by the fewest and most doubtful manuscripts, is the true reading. Now if their views of the unity can be established, then the Trinity is an absurdity, and not all the testimony of all the writings on earth can establish it. But if it is a question that can be settled by the *balance of evidence*, then Unitarians violate the law of evidence by this mode of procedure.

In regard to this whole matter of "various readings," in the original manuscripts, it seems to me to have a very magnified aspect, from the imposing representations of Unitarian writers. "*Thirty thousand* different readings" sounds very ominous, but when it is found that most of these are about as important as the substitution of the article *an* instead of an *a*, or the omission of some letter in spelling a word, and that there are few that vary the sense of any sentence, and scarce any, where the balance of evidence is not decidedly in favor of the common reading, the supposed evils on this matter are much less than is often supposed.\*

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\*"There is no reason to suppose, that the sacred text has, *in any material points*, been interpolated, or corrupted. From the ancient versions of the Scriptures, from the writings of the fathers, and from a comparison of manuscripts, it has been shown, in the most satisfactory manner, by biblical scholars, that our sacred books have been preserved in great purity, and are in all essential matters, what they were when they came from the hands of their authors. In the beginning of the last century, great alarm was excited by the vast number of various readings that were discovered by critics, in examining and comparing ancient manu-

One other point I will suggest as a topic for examination, in regard to the violation of the laws of language by Unitarian writers. It is a fundamen-

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scripts. Infidels began to triumph at the discovery of an argument which they were confident would at once overthrow the authority of the Scriptures; and even Christians expressed some uneasiness, lest the foundations of their faith should be affected, and uncertainty be introduced into the doctrines of the gospel. Dr. Mill discovered 30,000 various readings in the New Testament; many more have since been discovered, and those that have been found in collecting various manuscripts of the Old Testament, have risen to many hundred thousand. But what do these various readings amount to? In a vast majority of cases to nothing more than whether an i shall be dotted, and a t crossed, or whether you shall spell the word honor, honour, or, or. Not one of a thousand of these various readings affects the sense of the passages where they occur; and not one of all of them, teaches any doctrine, or states any fact which is not to be found elsewhere in the Bible. It is acknowledged by the very critics by whose industry the various readings have been collected, that the sacred text is competently exact, even in the worst manuscript now extant, and that not one article of faith or moral precept is either perverted or lost in it. We may therefore say, with one of the most eminent of critics; (Dr. Bently.) 'Put thirty thousand various readings that have been discovered in manuscripts of the New Testament into the hands of a knave or a fool, and make them as many more, if numbers of copies can ever be found to reach that sum; and yet, with the most sinister and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that every feature of it will be the same.' At the same time, it is consoling to the Christian mind to know, that while the industry of biblical scholars has brought to light so great a number of various readings in the sacred text, no one point of doctrine or duty is affected by the discovery, and that the result of their labors has been to settle the text on a permanent basis, and to increase our confidence in its general purity and correctness."—*Dr. Hawes' Lecture on the Literary History of the Bible.*



tal principle, that all terms are to be taken in their literal and most common use, unless it can be shown, that this would involve a sentiment that is either contrary to reason, or contrary to the known nature or properties of the thing spoken of, or contrary to the other declarations of the writer. Now take the doctrine of eternal punishments, for an example. The Bible certainly does say that "the wicked shall go away into *everlasting* punishment." Now *everlasting* here, means, in its common and literal sense, *time without end*. The only way to sustain for this expression a figurative meaning, signifying *a long period*, is to show that the literal sense would be contrary to reason, or contrary to the known properties of mind, or contrary to the other declarations of the inspired writers. The Unitarians prove none of these things, and yet they say, either that the punishment of the wicked will not be everlasting, or else that no one can know whether it will be or not.

Now I do not see how any communication from heaven in the language of men, can be of any service, if every one may bend its language to any sense they prefer, without regard to the laws of language. And it is by violating these laws, that it seems to me Unitarians gain their peculiar views, and at the same time destroy the confidence of men in the inspired writings.

I will point out one other case to your notice, if you choose to decide so important a matter by your own investigation.

Take John 1: 1. "In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was *with God*, and the Word *was God*."

This is a passage free from all dispute as to the record; it is safely preserved in all the manuscripts of any authority, and in all the ancient versions. It cannot be shaken by doubts as to its being an interpolation or alteration. The Unitarian says, *God*, in the first case in that sentence, has its usual primary sense, meaning the Being who possesses all the attributes of Divinity, viz; creative power, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. Then they take the word *God*, in the phrase "*and the Word was God*." Here, they say, the term has not its primary, ordinary, signification. But why not? Is it contrary to reason, or contrary to the known properties of the thing spoken of, or contrary to the other declarations of the writer? For unless it be shown to be one of these, it must have its primary and literal meaning, just as it has in the first case.

But the Unitarian interpreter says, that there is a unity predicated of God, which makes it an absurdity to say there are three divine persons, each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity; and then on this *assumption*, (for he does not attempt to prove it,) he says that the term God is used in the secondary sense, as it is where Moses is said to be "a god to Pharaoh," and rulers are called "gods," to those whom they govern.

On the contrary, the Trinitarian interpreter says, that the term God in the second case, means the same as it does in the first, because there is no

reason why it should not. It is not contrary to reason to say, that there are three divine persons, each having the attributes of Divinity ; for reason without revelation, teaches only that there must be *one* such divine person ; but it does not teach that there cannot be more than one.

It is not contrary to the known properties of the subject, for Jesus Christ, in various other parts of the Bible, has the work of creation and all the attributes of Deity ascribed to him. It is not contrary to the other declarations of the inspired writers, for they no where declare that Christ is not the God who made the heaven and earth, and who has not divine attributes, but directly assert it. And in regard to the passages which declare that there is but one God, they merely assert, that there are some particulars in which the Divine persons, who each have the distinctive attributes of Deity, are so one, that it is proper, in conformity to the general use of this term, to say they are one God. That is, in some respects, (it matters not whether revealed or unrevealed, whether mysterious or not,) there is a unity, which gives no foundation for distinguishing them as two or more. And when the Unitarians object to this, that Christ is called a man, and that this is contradictory to the declaration that he is God, they must *prove* it, and not merely assert it ; and they must also meet the same difficulty themselves, when they allow that he is *super-angelic*. For whatever makes it consistent to call a super-angelic being, a man, makes

it proper to call a Divine being, a man. One class of Unitarians avoid this difficulty by saying that he was a *mere* man, commencing his existence at birth, and being just like all other men. And this is the only way to escape this difficulty in their system. But then what do they do with all the texts asserting his eternal existence, and all that relates to his mercy and love in leaving heaven and the Father, and coming to earth? They are obliged to proceed still farther, in violating the laws of language, till they make the Bible a mere collection of falsehoods.

I will point out one other case in which Unitarian critics and theologians violate the laws of interpretation. As before stated, the chief law is, that an expression is to be taken in its common literal sense, unless it is contrary to reason, or to the known properties of the object, as learned by experience, or contrary to the other declarations of the writer. In such cases, and in such only, the secondary or the figurative sense is to be given. For example, when Christ says of the bread and wine, "this is my body, and this is my blood," the literal sense would be contrary to the known properties of flesh and blood, bread and wine, and therefore the figurative is the true sense. When the hills are called "everlasting," the literal common meaning would be contrary to the other declarations of inspired writers, and therefore the figurative sense is to be adopted. But most Unitarian critics claim that when the devil and fallen spirits are spoken of, the figurative sense is to be taken ;

and yet they never show that the literal sense is contrary to reason, or to the known nature of the thing spoken of, or contrary to the other declarations of the sacred writers. By this practice they break down all barriers that protect the Bible from abuse, and justify the Mormons, the Swedenborgians, the Shakers, and all others, who choose to give fanciful and figurative meanings to literal passages, or literal meanings to figurative passages. This is the way in which the divine authority of revelation is as effectually destroyed, as it is by the direct denial of its inspiration ; for a revelation whose meaning cannot be gained by regular and consistent rules of interpretation, is of no use. It leaves every man to make his own system of faith and practice, and then to support it, by giving any meaning to the language of revelation that will suit his system.

One more suggestion I will offer for your future use, if you are disposed to judge in this matter by your own investigation, instead of trusting to others.

You will find that Unitarians, in controversy on the main topic of difference, the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, have an advantage in this respect ; their opponents do not controvert their main position, viz. that God the Father has all the attributes of Supreme Divinity. But you know that the Swedenborgians claim that Christ is the only God spoken of, both in the Old and New Testament, and that the Father is not a distinct person from him, but only another name for the same being regarded in another relation ; just as some Unitarians say the Holy Ghost is not a dis-

inct person from the Father, but only another name for the same being.

Now I wish you would attempt to meet a Swedenborgian on the following points. First, try to prove the *distinct personality* of the Father, and then I think you will find that you must use just exactly the same method that Trinitarians use, in proving the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. Next proceed to prove the *divinity* of the Father, and you will find that you can do it in no better, and in no other way, than that in which Trinitarians prove the divinity of the Son; viz. by showing that all the names, attributes and actions, of God, in its highest sense, are ascribed to him. Then try to prove that it is the Father who is the God of the Old Testament, and see if you can find any other mode of proof than that which sustains the position, that it is Jesus Christ who is the God spoken of through the Old Testament. For, bear in mind, that the names Lord, Jehovah, and God, do not show *which* is intended, the Father, or the Son. Of course, in this process, we are restricted to passages that ascribe to the *Father by name*, the attributes, names and actions of the Divinity, and to those passages in the New Testament, which refer to the texts in the Old Testament having reference to the Father and not to the Son. There is one passage in Isaiah, where there is a most magnificent description of Jehovah, and in the New Testament in speaking of Christ, the Evangelist refers to this passage thus, "these things said Esaias when he saw His glory (Christ's) and spake of

Him." It is such references as these, that are demanded to prove that the Father was the God of the Old Testament. I believe if you will read the Old and New Testament with reference to this point, you will find the proof that Christ was the God of the Old Testament, is as decided, as the proof that the Father was.

In conclusion, let me inquire if it is not your duty to examine this matter for yourself, and *decide* where the truth is, by those laws of evidence which you employ in settling all the practical matters of life?

An Infidel, or a Unitarian, needs to be a very learned man, and a very diligent man; for he takes the hazardous side of the venture. It will do for me to rest on the testimony of others in trusting the Bible as a sure and infallible guide, which *never* presents contradictions, or errors, or mistakes,—for if Unitarianism *is* the true doctrine I am safe. But you are running the hazard of throwing aside all the most powerful motives that the gospel presents, which are calculated to influence the human mind to that course which prepares a man for heaven; and you ought to look well to your steps, in venturing on this dangerous ground.

I ask you, then, to commence a thorough examination of *both sides* of this question, taking for your guide these safe and indispensable rules.

First, That, is to be considered as truth, which has the balance of evidence in its favor.

Second, Nothing is to be *assumed* as true, which has not been shown to have the balance of evidence in its favor.

Third, The primary, literal meaning is to be given to all expressions, unless it can be shown that this would convey a sense contrary, either to reason, or to the known properties of the thing spoken of, or contrary to the other declarations of the writer.

If you will take these rules and use them fairly and thoroughly, I believe you will escape Unitarianism, and every other *ism* that is not the pure gospel which was preached by Christ and his Apostles.

Yours, &c.



## LETTER XVIII.

MY DEAR SIR,

I will first reply to some of your remarks upon the manner in which Unitarians are treated by the Christian sects who differ from them in sentiment. To a part of your remarks, I entirely assent. I do not think it either right or wise to manifest toward any person, either dislike or contempt, on account of any opinions he may hold, however erroneous. There is no sentiment, however wild, visionary or absurd, which has not been adopted by honest, amiable and conscientious minds, under the influence either of education, or excited imagination, or a weak intellect, or false reasonings, or the bias of feeling, or other influences that entitle them to the sympathy and kindness of those from whom they differ, rather than to opprobrious rebuke. It is the voluntary perpetration of what at the time *is known to be wrong*, that alone gives just cause for indignation, and retributive contempt and dislike. Where men differ in intellectual views of duty,

kindness and fair argument are the only proper weapons of warfare.

It is very important, therefore, to make a distinction between the *opinions*, or the fatal *tendencies* of opinions, and the *persons* who hold these opinions; or, as Coleridge would express it, between *ans* and *isms*. But it is a distinction which is not so readily preserved; and men are very apt to allow the dislike and disapprobation they feel for what is false and injurious in opinions, to be associated with the persons who adopt and propagate such sentiments. This part of the evil, in regard to Unitarians, I as sincerely deprecate and condemn as you do. I deem it the duty of all Christians, to treat them, and all other persons, of whatever religious views, with all the respect, and kindness, and regard, which their other good qualities entitle them to receive. I do not think it is right to undervalue their talents, or acquirements, or amiable dispositions, or honorable and upright principles, or the sincerity of their religious belief, or their *piety*, if they give proper evidence of it.

But when I say I would give them credit for their *piety*, on seeing proper evidence of it, I should not judge by *their* standard, but by *my own*. If I see the evidence of true piety existing in a Unitarian, a Catholic, or one of any other sect, I would never refuse them the name and claims of a child of God, because of their false intellectual views. Yet this would make no difference with my views or feelings as to the disastrous nature and tendency of the religious system they maintain and attempt to

propagate ; nor at all weaken my desire and efforts to convince them, and every one else, of these fatal tendencies. Such charity would no more affect my feelings and efforts, than it would yours, if, in trying to prevent your fellow men from drinking intoxicating liquors, you should find a man who through life had drank them freely, and yet was habitually healthy.

The general maxim that regulates my feelings and actions on this subject is this, that it is *right* views of truth and duty that make it probable we shall secure eternal life, and that the nearer our opinions are right, the greater this probability of safety, and the farther we depart from the truth, the less the hope of eternal life. And because there is a possibility that men *may* receive the most pernicious errors, and yet attain, in the end, that character which fits for heaven, I no more feel safe and justified in being easy and unconcerned in seeing them adopt and propagate such errors, than I feel easy in seeing men honestly believing it safe to take arsenic, and persuading their fellow men to take it, although I know there is a *possibility* that some may escape the death it is calculated to produce.

In regard to calling Unitarians *Infidels*, I think it is wrong, because, in the ordinary acceptation of that term in society, it is false, and is doing them injustice. As it is usually received, it signifies a man who refuses all claims of respect to the Bible, who despises the religion it teaches, and who is an opposer of all religious objects. This is the *com-*

*mon* idea attached to the term Infidel. Whereas Unitarians claim to take their opinions from the Bible as their rule of faith and practice ; they, at least to some extent, admit its claims as a divine revelation, and they do not take the course in regard to religion which avowed Infidels usually do. It is therefore unfair and unjust to attach to them a name which is opprobrious, and which in its common use they do not deserve.

Yet still, some allowance is to be made for those who have done it, on this ground, that the *system of Unitarianism* is, to those who oppose it, nothing else and nothing better than *a system of infidelity*. By a system of infidelity I mean, *a system that destroys confidence in the Bible*.

There are two ways in which we can lose confidence in the Bible ; the first way is by losing confidence in its claims as a divine revelation, and the second is, by losing all confidence in the practicability of knowing what it teaches. It is like the case of children, who should receive a letter from a parent, filled with commands as to duty, and warnings of danger, and directions as to the way of safety. Infidelity denies that the letter is from the father, and despises it as a forgery ; Unitarianism receives it respectfully, and says no one can know what it contains. Does not one method destroy confidence in this communication as really as the other ? Unitarians may claim that *to them* their system does not destroy confidence in the Bible, as infidelity would do ; but their opponents do not perceive the evidence of this ; they do not find that

Unitarians have that confidence in the Bible that other Christian sects have, while they clearly perceive that to their own minds, (and they judge of the minds of others by their own,) Unitarianism would be the destruction of all confidence in the Bible.

Plain common-sense minds would reason thus. Here is a book that teaches that it is idolatry and the greatest of crimes to worship any but the true God, and yet it gives all the names, and attributes, and claims of God, to Jesus Christ, who, according to Unitarianism, is not the true God. And it does this so plainly and unequivocally, that those who take it for their guide in matters of faith, have, from its very first promulgation to this day, considered him and worshipped him as God. The only exception to this universal mistake caused by the Bible, is the case of a small sect who were first heard of in history, some three hundred years after the New Testament was written. At that time a convocation of christian bishops and clergy, at the council of Nice, decided that the doctrine of this sect was a *new* doctrine, and that Jesus Christ had always been regarded and worshipped as God down to that time.

And from that day to this, the immense majority of all who sincerely study the Bible *for themselves*, have really supposed that it taught that Jesus Christ was "the true God and eternal life." Moreover, they have supposed the Bible taught that everlasting misery was the penalty of disobedience to the requisitions of the gospel; whereas, according to

Unitarianism, no such thing is taught ; but merely the fact, that those who are virtuous will be better off, and those who are vicious worse off in a future state.

Now a book that leads to such mistakes as this, both in regard to the duties of religion, and the penalties that enforce them, and has misled so large a proportion of those who read and study it, honestly desiring to find its true meaning, is not worthy of confidence. If Jesus Christ is not taught to be God in the Bible, and if eternal punishments are not revealed there, then no one can tell what is taught, and the book is good for nothing. This is the way in which I have heard multitudes of common people, who follow only the guidance of common sense, reason about it.

You will find that there is a great difference between Unitarians and those who differ from them, in their respect for the Bible, and confidence in it. You will find all christian sects appealing to it as a *perfect* standard of faith and practice, and feeling that when, by fair interpretation, it can be discovered what the Bible says, it is instantly allowed that it must be right and must be true. But it is melancholy to observe the difference in Unitarian writers. Among their leading and standard writers, such as Dr. Priestly, Dr. Price, and others, you will find mistakes and ignorance charged to the inspired writers, and interpolations, alterations and false translations so constantly alluded to, as to weaken all confidence in, and respect for such records. Dr. Priestly says in one case, that sooner than ad-

mit the most obvious meaning of a certain passage, he would believe "that the old apostle dictated one thing, and his amanuensis wrote another." It is but fair to admit that American Unitarians have not gone to such indecent lengths in this way, as some of their English brethren; but no one can read their periodicals, without constantly finding expressions that allow great imperfections and mistakes in the inspired record, especially when referring to the Old Testament.

It is meeting such things in Unitarian writings; it is seeing how uncertain Unitarians feel in regard to how much of the Bible is true, and how much is false; it is perceiving how their principles and modes of treating the Bible, would naturally destroy all respect for the Bible; it is perceiving how frequently those who begin with Unitarianism end in Infidelity; it is observing how infidels regard Unitarianism, and how readily they unite in propagating and sustaining its principles and its religious institutions, that seem to justify the impression that Unitarianism is but another name for Infidelity.

In regard to what you remark about denying to Unitarians the name of Christians, I would offer a few considerations.

When the term "Christian" is to be applied, you must be aware, that there are at least three senses in which it is employed. In the most general sense, it means, a person who belongs to a nation where the Christian religion predominates. In this sense no one denies that Unitarians are Christians. The term is used also to signify, a man who is truly

pious, in distinction from one who is worldly and not pious. Now if a Unitarian claims that he is religious, in my sense of the term, that is, a man whose heart and life is so devoted to the love and service of his Maker, that no earthly interest has an equal place in his mind, God forbid that I, or any other person, should assume the office of the omniscient Judge, and say that it is not so. But if he means by piety, an amiable disposition, a good moral life, and serious and devoted attendance on the offices and externals of religion, I say that this is not piety, as I understand the term, and I cannot allow that he is a pious man, if this is all he claims as evidence of his piety. The term is used also, to signify, a man who *believes in the doctrines of christianity*. It is in this use of the term, that Unitarians are ordinarily regarded as not Christians, by those who differ from them, and where, so far as I can perceive, it is right so to regard them.

For my part, although I am not conscious of a single feeling that would lead me to say an unkind or injurious word of any individual Unitarian on earth, or that would not lead me to do them every act of justice and kindness in my power, I must be allowed the right of thinking that Unitarianism is not Christianity, and its ministers are not the teachers of Christianity, and that there is no obligation of any kind to acknowledge them as such, any more than to acknowledge the teachers of Mahometanism as Christian teachers. And in saying this, I claim no other right than Unitarians claim and exercise, when they say that the doctrines of



Atheism are not christianity, and that Fanny Wright and Robert Owen are not to be acknowledged as Christian ministers. These two persons deny doctrines that Unitarians think essential to Christianity, and if they were so inconsistent as to call themselves Christians, it would make no difference; Unitarians would never allow them the name or the privileges of Christians in their pulpits or churches. Atheists deny, (and honestly too,) the doctrines deemed essential to christianity by Unitarians, and therefore Unitarians refuse them the name and privileges of Christians. Unitarians deny the doctrines that their opponents deem essential to christianity, why may not their opponents be allowed the same rights that Unitarians claim for themselves?

If the opponents of Unitarianism really and honestly believe that it is not christianity, I do not see how they can be blamed for any thing but *wrong belief*.

But this is contrary to the very first maxim of Unitarianism, which teaches that a man is not to suffer any odium for his opinions. I do not perceive how *consistent* Unitarians can blame any of their opponents for denying to them the name and privileges of Christians, till they can show one of three things; either that they are hypocrites, and do not believe as they pretend they do; or else that they are bound to give up their opinions, because Unitarians think they are wrong; or else that they are bound to act inconsistently with their

principles and their conscientious belief. I do not believe that you, or Unitarians generally, would demand any of these unreasonable concessions. But how they make their principles and their practice in this matter consistent, I do not clearly perceive.

When we speak of Christianity in distinction from Mahometanism, Judaism, or Deism, we do not mean those doctrines or truths which are *held in common* by all. We mean those peculiar doctrines which are *distinctive*, and which make Christianity a different system from the others.

Now what I would attempt to maintain is this, that Unitarianism does not teach the distinctive doctrines of Christianity, but only doctrines which are held in common with Mahometans, Deists, or Jews.

Unitarianism teaches that there is but one God, so does Mahometanism, Judaism, and Deism. It teaches the immortality of the soul, and that in a future state, men will be rewarded and punished for the deeds done in the body. So does Mahometanism ; so does Judaism. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." There is abundant evidence that the Jews were taught, and believed in a future state of rewards and punishments, and in the immortality of the soul. The most refined systems of Deism also, teach that the virtuous man will probably fare better in a future state of existence than the vicious man. Unitarianism teaches also that a man can

be pardoned on repentance and reformation. So does Judaism. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

I will not go on with farther particulars, but put the matter fairly into your own hands. I ask, then, that in your next letter, you will state to me what you consider to be the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, which distinguish it from natural religion as taught by the best sort of Deists, or Judaism as taught in the Old Testament.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XIX.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your letter has cost me no little study. It is indeed filled with noble, interesting, and vivid sentiments, and exhibits the impress of a feeling and cultivated mind ; but pardon my frankness when I say, that it has a defect which always troubles me when I attempt to ascertain exactly what are the views and opinions of Unitarian writers on the fundamental truths of religion. There is a vagueness, an indistinctness, an uncertainty as to what is intended, that is perplexing and painful. I have bestowed no little effort in collating and comparing expressions, and in trying to ascertain exactly what is meant by the terms employed ; and yet when I wish to meet your statements, I am entirely uncertain whether I properly understand exactly what are your ideas.

That I might be aided in the discovery, I again examined the writings of Professor Ware and his son, whom, as the teachers of Unitarian Divinity in

their theological school, and as men who rank high with those who know them best, for candor, intelligence, and moral worth, I thought I might regard as proper sources of information.

From these and the data your letter furnishes, I should infer that Unitarians consider the *peculiarities* of the Gospel to be these ; that it reveals the immortality of man ; that it teaches that pardon can be obtained by repentance and reformation ; that it reveals the paternal character of God the Father more clearly than it was revealed in the Old Testament ; that it presents a perfect system of moral duties ; that it exhibits Jesus Christ as a Messenger from God, and a teacher of a more perfect system ; that it presents his character as being like God, his perfect example for our imitation, and his death as the seal of his sincerity. I have made a collection of all that I could find, that it seemed to me you would say should be included in this list, and now, my friend, I wish you would examine this matter thoroughly for yourself, and answer me these questions. Is there not the balance of evidence in favor of the assertion, that the Jews already were instructed in the immortality of the soul ? Does not the Old Testament teach that pardon can be obtained by repentance and reformation ? Can you find any texts in the New Testament that paint the paternal character of the Deity in more touching and glowing language, than it is taught in such passages as these from the Old Testament ? “Like as a

father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow unto anger and of great goodness, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee." Is there any one moral duty taught in the New Testament, for which you cannot find a parallel passage inculcating the same duty in the Old Testament?

It is my belief, that a candid and full investigation will satisfy you, that in none of these respects, do the doctrines that Unitarians hold, differ from Judaism as it is taught in the Old Testament?

Nor is it a peculiarity of the gospel that Christ is a messenger from God, for this the Mahometans believe.

All then that remains is that Christ was *a character like God*, and a *perfect example*, and *proved his sincerity by his death*. At least this is all of which I can gain any such *definite* idea, as to be able to express it in my own language, with any degree of certainty, that I have stated correctly the views of a Unitarian writer.

I have taken Professor Henry Ware's work on the character and offices of Christ, and I studied it thoroughly, and then sought to answer this question; in what respect according to this writer, was Christ different from Paul, as a *teacher and a Savior*? It was not in the nature of his instructions,

for Paul taught all that Christ did. It was not that Christ suffered scorn, rebuke, poverty, and sorrow, for so did Paul to an equal extent, and for a longer period. It was not that Christ sealed his sincerity by a bloody and painful death, for so also did Paul. It was in nothing of which I could gain any distinct idea, except that Christ was without sin, and a perfect example, and in these respects an image of the invisible God.

I then studied it, to answer these questions. From what future evil, according to this writer, did Christ come to save us, and what is the method of securing this salvation?

Must every human being become truly pious, or go to everlasting ruin, and eternal suffering?

Or must every man be a moral and exemplary character in all the daily duties of life, or be lost forever?

Or will all mankind be punished in a future state according to the evils done here, and after that, secure eternal happiness? Or is the author uncertain on this point, being without any definite opinion himself, so that he is unable to say any thing more than this; that a man who is virtuous in this life will be better off in a future state, than one who is vicious?

I then inquired, who is Jesus Christ? Is he a Deity, or one having the attributes of Deity? Or is he a created being, sent from heaven to become a man, and teach, and set a perfect example; thus uniting in one person, a being who is super-angelic and super-human, and yet a human being also?

Or is the author uncertain of every thing except that he was a being, having a perfect and blameless character ?

Now I do assure you I could not at all decide these questions, though I read and studied the book over and over some four or five times. And yet it is a work written by a Professor of Unitarian theology, for the express purpose of telling who and what Christ is, and for what it was that he came into the world.

I will now endeavor to state to you the ground upon which I claim that Unitarianism is not Christianity.

I will first premise in regard to moral and religious instructions, that there are two things necessary ; the first is for men to *know what their duty is* ; and the second is, sufficient *motives to influence them to choose to do it*. In regard to the first point, it strikes me there is no great difficulty. If all mankind, in every case, were to do *exactly as they thought was right*, and never in a single instance fail, I believe most of the disorders of sin would cease. All men universally know and believe, that it is wrong to pursue those indulgences that injure themselves, and to allow those passions which injure their fellow men. There is a feeling in every intelligent mind, of obligation to obey the will of the Creator, wherever it is known ; to avoid injurious indulgences, and to *do justly* towards our fellow men. There is no doubt, if every human being would, through the whole course of existence in this world, in all cases, do as well as he knew how, that most of the miseries of sin on earth would



cease ; while all men would certainly secure heaven. For there would be nothing for which to condemn men, but honest mistakes in judgment, or unavoidable ignorance. This, to a righteous judge would be an occasion of sympathy and pity, and not of blame. The great difficulty then to be overcome, is *unwillingness*, and the great object of a system of religion is to present motives, that will make men willing to do what they know to be right, and avoid all they know to be wrong.

One way to aid in securing this, would be for the Creator plainly to make known, in all points, what is right and what is wrong, that the bias of wrong desires may not pervert the judgment, and that men may not only have the guidance of reason and conscience, but the mandate of their Creator, to give definiteness and authority to the rules of right and wrong.

We need, then, from our Creator a revelation, communicating a standard of right and wrong, to guide and regulate the judgment of men, and to give authority to the rules of rectitude. But as I before said, this is but the minor part ; we want still more, *strong motives* that shall influence mankind *to do* the will of God, and that system of revelation would be the best, which presents the strongest and most effectual motives.

The Old Testament contains the first revelations from God. In this we find all the essential rules of rectitude. There is not a single moral virtue enjoined, or a single evil forbidden in the New Testament, which was not required or forbidden in the Old. The gospel, or Christianity then, was not de-

signed to reveal a standard of right and wrong, sustained by the authority of the Creator, for that was done before. Its design then must be, to bring to bear on the human mind stronger sanctions, or *more powerful motives*. Let us inquire then, what sanctions the Old Testament presented to influence men, and then we can still more readily discover in what the peculiarities of christianity consist; for it is a communication that is valuable, as conferring something not before bestowed. The gospel is good *news*. The Old Testament then, teaches the rules of right and wrong; it teaches that there is a perfect Jehovah, who knows all that his creatures do; who is pleased when they do right, and displeased when they do wrong. We are told that "it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked;" that even in this life, rewards shall be given to the righteous and punishment to the wicked, to some extent. And when the Psalmist was troubled to see how little was done in this way on earth, he was taught to look to a *future state* of retribution, and he recorded this for the encouragement of all who came after. It is a matter of history, that the Jews did believe in a future state of retribution, and it is a matter of record that the doctrine is to be found in the Old Testament, though not so clearly as in the New. The peculiarity of Christianity then, is not that it reveals the immortality of the soul, the moral duties of men and a future state of rewards and punishments; for these were already known to the Jews. They knew that they were to exist in a future state, and that they were to be rewarded

for the deeds done in the body, before Christ came.

If then Christianity is not peculiar in revealing the *duties* of mankind, its peculiarity must consist in its disclosing some *new* and *stronger* motives to produce obedience.

Now in order fully to understand the case, it is necessary to consider the constitutional character of the human mind, and the circumstances in which it is placed.

Men are formed so as to be regulated in all things by the desire of happiness and the fear of suffering. Motives are another name for what is regarded by the mind as the means of enjoyment, or the cause of suffering. The way to influence all minds to do any thing, is to show that some *good* will be gained, or some *suffering* avoided by a given course; or there are two great classes of motives, those which promise enjoyment and those which threaten suffering.

Now mankind have found by experience that the most powerful means of governing mind, is by *the fear of suffering*. The parent finds the rod the last resort, when all motives of love, kindness, reason and entreaty fail. No parent can bring up a family, and enforce order, obedience, and faithfulness, without *some* penalty that causes privation and pain, as a retribution attending failure in duty. Thus also, the teachers of children find penalties indispensable. And thus the rulers of communities proceed. In the government of large commu-

nities, *pleasurable* motives are never offered for obedience to law ; it is always the painful penalty attached to *disobedience*, on which reliance is placed for enforcing what is necessary to the general welfare, as well as for individual happiness. And so indispensable is this deemed, that a law-giver would be considered a fool, who should make a law and have no painful sanction attached to it.

And it is an indisputable principle of the mind, that the fear of suffering pain is a much *more powerful* motive than the hope of future good. A man can often content himself in indolence, if the only penalty is not gaining some future *good* ; but let the fear of certain *suffering* come, and he instantly is moved to effort. Every body knows that they shall be happier to take a course of virtue, than to follow a vicious one ; but what would this world become, were there no other stimulus than this, and all *fear of retributive evil* for doing wrong were removed. Suppose no evil came on the guilty for indolence, cruelty, dishonesty, and deceit, what would become of the happiness of man ? The whole business of life moves on under the stimulus of *the fear of suffering*, in some form, if a given course is not pursued. And the greater the suffering threatened, the more powerful it operates to restrain.

Another maxim of experience also, will not be denied, and that is, that the *certainly* of punishment increases the power of motive. It is on this principle that the framers of laws are beginning to alter

their views, and to have punishments less severe and more certain. It was on this principle that Bonaparte, at the first appearance of a mob, brought up a field piece, and at the first move, sent through the unlawful assembly the messenger of death. If he had used exhortations and fired blank cartridges, the mob would not so quickly have dispersed. It was on this principle that Frederick of Prussia caused a soldier to be whipped for having his hat blow off. Though it seemed unjust, it secured the end. His soldiers took care not to have their hats blow off. If men know *certainly* that punishment will inevitably come, they will never waver or trust to chance. If there is some hope of escape, their inefficiency and negligence will be exactly proportionate to this hope.

From these principles of mind established by experience, what should we say would be the best method of securing obedience to the laws of rectitude revealed by Deity.

It would doubtless be, that rewards be offered for obedience, and that suffering be threatened for disobedience. The efficiency of these motives would be strong or weak, just in proportion to the amount of good and evil to be acquired or suffered, and to the certainty or uncertainty that is felt as to their connection with obedience or disobedience.

That system of divine legislation, then, must be the best, that offers the greatest rewards and the most dreadful sufferings as the sanctions of its laws ; and which at the same time secures the greatest

*certainty* as to their being rendered. Whatever, then, lessens the value of the good to be gained, or lessens the fear of the evil to be suffered, or lessens the feeling of certainty as to the fulfilment of the sanctions, so much diminishes the value and efficiency of moral government over mind.

On the subject of the *pleasurable motives* which operate upon mind, there are confessedly none more powerful than *love* and *gratitude*. The world is full of adages, in poetry and prose, that express the omnipotent energy of love, in surmounting obstacles, and in overcoming dullness or inefficiency.

As love is caused by the view of *certain traits of character*, and by the belief of *reciprocal regard*, the more perfect and elevated the character, and noble the actions, the stronger the affection ; and when to this is added, the assurance of a return of regard, it still more excites this affection.

Yet more strongly is affection increased by benefits conferred that awaken *gratitude* ; and if these benefits are secured by personal sacrifices from the being who is loved, it is the highest cause that can operate to awaken gratitude and affection. We have learned of affection and gratitude so strong, that tortures and death could not make it waver. Every thing dear and valued on earth was nothing, when compared with the safety, the happiness, or even the wishes of the object thus loved. Now it is the intention of God, that the mainspring of pleasurable excitement, in the great family he has made, shall be *love* to himself, and thus his sovereign will

become the will of all, and perfect benevolence and unity of action, be secured through the universe.

What, then, according to the laws of mind, as gained by experience, are the most likely methods to secure this love to our Maker. The first thing needed, is exhibitions of all the perfections of character that can awaken love. The second exhibiting proofs of regard and interest from God to his creatures. The third, affection from our Creator, exhibited by personal sacrifices, to gain blessings for us, or to save us from suffering.

Now a revelation that comes the nearest to securing these things, all other things being equal, has the most power to secure obedience by *pleasurable* motives. And the power of pleasurable motives is reduced or increased, just in proportion as God's character is made unlovely ; or as there are doubts induced or removed as to his love towards us ; or as there is evidence, or want of evidence, that he has that affection which has made sacrifices to secure our happiness, or to save us from woe.

Now in regard to exhibitions of God as our Creator, as the giver of all our enjoyments, as wise, as just, and as benevolent, the Mahometan, the Deist, the Jew, the Unitarian, all stand on the same ground. As to the exhibitions of *moral duty*, the Jew and the Unitarian are on the same ground ; both believe the moral precepts contained in the Old Testament, to be a perfect standard of rectitude.

I am now prepared to inquire, does the gospel, as interpreted by Unitarians, present any new manifestations of the character of God, calculated to awaken affection? Does it present any new exhibitions of his love to us? Does it exhibit any proof of a sacrifice on the part of our Maker to promote our happiness? These queries relate to *pleasurable motives* that stimulate the human mind to action.

Now for the motives that appeal to the fear of suffering. Does it make the punishment of sin any more dreadful than the Old Testament? Does it make it appear any more *certain*?

Now take the synopsis of your letter, and of all Unitarian exhibitions of the gospel, and it seems to me they amount to this. Jesus Christ came into the world a messenger and teacher sent from God; he is a perfect example of excellence; he is a mediator between God and man; and he has taught us a perfect system of duty; he has taught us, also, that by repentance and reformation our sins can be pardoned; and he died as a martyr to attest his sincerity. In regard to the penal sanctions, exciting our fears, I cannot certainly affirm what Unitarians do suppose the gospel to teach.

Now I cannot perceive any thing in any one of these propositions, calculated to operate as any new or more powerful motive either pleasurable or painful, than existed before the gospel dispensation. Jesus Christ is not God, only a perfect being, sent as his messenger, just as the prophets were, and unless he reveals something we did not know



before about God, no views of Christ's character or deeds, unless he is God himself, tend to awaken affection to our Maker. Nor do I perceive how Christ's perfect example, or his death, serve in any way to exhibit motives calculated either to awaken affection towards God, or fears of penal evil. And pardon by repentance and reformation, were clearly taught before the gospel dispensation.

Beside all this, the Unitarian view of the gospel, to my mind, presents some most melancholy and painful views of God's character. Jesus Christ is the most perfect being of which the human mind can conceive, and he came as our friend, our mediator, our intercessor, the martyr of his love to us. But according to Unitarian views, he came to teach us that we must not love him supremely, but give to another the *first* place in our affections; another whom we cannot understand so well, who never loved us and suffered for us as he has done; another, who is a spirit, removed from all those modes of conception that most tenderly appeal to the human heart. Jesus Christ has been with us; has known all our trials and difficulties; has been a son, a brother, a citizen, a friend, a sufferer. He has felt all we are called to feel, and has loved us with more than mortal love. And yet, when all our thronging, tender, grateful affections turn and cling to him, it is not right; it is the invisible, eternal, awful, sublime Spirit, who claims the first place in our love, and to give it to another is idolatry.

Then comes up the painful misgivings; why was our benefactor, our friend, our teacher, one so per-

fect and so pure, why was he condemned to suffer so? Why did it "please the Lord to afflict him?" Why was the only being that ever did perfectly obey the law, the one selected for such keen punishment? What are we to think of a Being that pardons the guilty, and punishes perfect innocence; who sends perfection among us, and forbids us to love our generous benefactor as much as he who inflicts the blows upon him? I never yet found any Unitarian explanation of this mysterious dispensation, that did not make me shrink back with distrust and dismay, at what seemed to me such dark and mysterious views of the character of God, and of his dispensations to man. I may not have seen all that is said by Unitarians to make their views consistent with the wisdom, goodness and justice of an almighty God; but it is not because I have not sought it from every proper and legitimate source, and I never found any thing yet, that was not dark, mysterious, and unsatisfactory.

The gospel is declared to be *good news*; a new revelation of things not understood before, and calculated to make men happier on earth, and to fit them for heaven. And those who are called *Evangelical Christians*, in distinction from Unitarians, believe that it is a revelation, that presents new and stronger motives to lead men to love and obey their Creator. They believe that Jesus Christ was "God manifest in the flesh;" the very Being who created us, who governs us, who gives us all our blessings. They believe that He came on earth to make the most sublime and touching ex-

hibition of virtue and benevolence, which is most calculated to call forth reverence, and admiration, and grateful love. They believe that, seeing we are called upon to make painful sacrifices for the good of others, our Creator and Redeemer came to set us an example of this most difficult duty, so that now when he calls upon us to make painful sacrifices for the salvation of our fellow beings, his own example is presented to stimulate and excite. “Let this mind be in *you* which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” They believe that this was a new manifestation of the character of God, such as was never before exhibited, and such as makes the strongest appeals to our feelings of admiration, love and gratitude. And in all their duties, trials, temptations and difficulties, they look to Him as their Almighty and ever present Friend, who “can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, having in all points suffered” as they themselves are called to do. And they feel no fears of robbing the Father of his due, in thus loving and worshipping their Savior, while they are so often assured that he that honoreth the Son honoreth the Father, and he that loveth the Son loveth the Father, and he that knoweth the Son knoweth the Father, and he that seeth the Son seeth the Father. They believe tha

Christ is so *one* with the Father, that whatever love and homage is rendered to the one, is equally rendered to the other.

In addition to this new view of the character of God, and the display of his tenderness, pity and sympathising love, which were exhibited during his appearance on earth, there are new views of the penal sanctions which enforce obedience.

By the revelations of the New Testament, we arrive at more certainty that *piety towards God* is the indispensable condition of future safety; and that all who do not attain it, will exist through eternity in perpetual sin and perpetual suffering. The terms of eternal life, and the *certainty* of the penal sanctions, and of sanctions the most awful which it is possible to conceive, are clearly disclosed, and from the very lips of the Creator and Judge of mankind.

These then, are what evangelical Christians deem the peculiarities of the gospel, that distinguish it from pure Deism, or the religion of nature, and from Judaism, and from Unitarianism.

The gospel, in their view, is a revelation of new and stronger motives to enforce obedience; a clearer exhibition of the way of salvation, and of the evils and danger that attend all who refuse to seek this way.\* And they believe not only that these are the peculiarities of the gospel, but that it

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\* The influence of the Atonement in *sustaining law* is not alluded to here. Abbott's Corner Stone presents this part of the subject in the clearest and most interesting manner.

is the solemn duty of all who hold them, to refuse all tokens of recognition as fellow Christians, to men who deny them, and to refuse to acknowledge as the ministers of Jesus Christ those who do not preach them. And I claim that if these are their sincere opinions and honest belief, then it is as much persecution and bigotry to try to cast odium on them for acting according to their principles, as it is to cast odium on the Quakers, or any other sect, for acting according to their principles. Will you tell me wherein I am wrong in this?

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XX.

MY DEAR SIR,

You appoint me rather a delicate and difficult task, when you refer to the practical moral tendencies of Unitarianism, and appeal to Boston for the illustration of the tendencies of a religion, which is to be judged of by its fruits. When you ask whether I know of a place where the best fruits of religion, in all public and private virtues, are more generally to be found, I am ready to answer that I know of no place which is its superior in these respects. But this answer does not seem to involve me in the difficulties, you appear to think it might.

In the first place, we cannot judge of the influence of a system of faith on individuals, without knowing them *intimately*. In many cases I should not feel at all qualified to judge, as to whether a given individual was really a person of piety, without much personal acquaintance. If a person *professes* piety in the sense in which I understand it, and I know nothing to the contrary, I should hope it was so. If a person professes piety, and lives an incon-

sistent life, I should fear it was not so. I have not mingled enough with individual Unitarians, in Boston, to be able to judge very extensively of their character in this respect; and moreover, you know among them there is not a dividing line, separating professors and non-professors of piety, so clearly marked as with us. In a community which does not mark the professors of piety in a distinct body, we have not the means of deciding how large a proportion of them would profess to be pious, and therefore have not such an opportunity of judging of that part of the christian character which is known only to an individual himself; namely, his feelings, motives and affections, in reference to his Creator. For you know an Atheist may be as amiable and as exemplary in all externals, as a Unitarian, and yet you would not call him a man of piety. A Unitarian may be amiable and exemplary in externals, and yet be utterly destitute of regard for his Maker, or of any desire or effort to please him. In a community, therefore, like the Unitarian, we have less data for deciding how many pious persons there are, than in an Orthodox community, where it is deemed a duty to profess piety as soon as it is believed to exist. Neither you nor I, therefore, have the means of knowing what proportion of the Unitarian community would say, that they possess those feelings towards God which I consider as an indispensable ingredient of true piety, and which can never be known to exist except by such a profession. It is not right to say, that we may hope piety exists wherever there is an amiable

and exemplary exterior; for I know multitudes who are amiable and exemplary in all externals, who would say that they have no love for God, and make no efforts to please him. I know of no other method of deciding upon the piety of an individual, than to learn his feelings towards his Maker by his words, and marking the corresponding actions of his life.

When you appeal to Boston then, you do not expect me to make any comparison with reference to any thing but the moral tendencies of Unitarianism, in producing the proper discharge of all *outward*, social, moral and religious duties. To know what passes in the heart, we must have *professions*, as well as corresponding *actions*. The question then is this, is not Unitarianism a system which is most favorable in its tendencies, as it regards all the moral duties of life, and is not Boston a fair exhibition of the affirmative.

Now to answer this properly, we must bear in mind, that to test the moral tendencies of a religious faith, requires a long period of time, and it especially requires that children be educated in that faith.

For if children are educated in a faith that is strict and supported by solemn sanctions, they cannot, in after days, divest themselves entirely of early impressions and habits of mind. It is the second and third generation that most fairly exhibit the moral tendencies of the faith in which they were educated. Now I say that Scotland, Switzerland, and New England are the countries where



the opposite doctrines of Unitarianism have been most extensively embraced, by the mass of the people, where children have from generation to generation been educated in them, and these are confessedly, the countries distinguished above all others for their purity of morals. And now for Boston. It was founded by the strictest sort of Puritans, by those who would sooner have cut off their right hands, than have built churches and colleges to propagate Unitarian sentiments. For two hundred years the doctrines denied by Unitarians were taught in the pulpits, school-rooms and nurseries, and all the institutions of society were influenced and modelled by these views.

At the present time in Boston, there are *thirteen* Unitarian churches, and *more than double the number* of churches in which are preached all the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel that Unitarians deny. Of these thirteen Unitarian churches, some seven or eight were founded by Evangelical Christians, and it is but about seventeen years since their clergymen openly avowed themselves to be Unitarians, and preached the peculiar sentiments of Unitarianism. In these churches are many persons brought up by orthodox parents, and some who still hold orthodox sentiments ; though their peculiar family relations and other causes, prevent their entire withdrawal. Unitarians preach all the moral duties of this life ; many of them preach the excellence and importance of true piety in the sense in which I regard it. They fail only in not preaching those truths of the gospel, which oper-

ate most powerfully to influence men to do the duties that Unitarian teachers inculcate. But these truths and motives still exist in the Bible, in spite of the doubt and uncertainty of Unitarian scepticism ; the very walls of their churches have scarcely done echoing them ; they are preached every day or evening in the week all around in the Evangelical churches ; Unitarians hear them urged by their orthodox friends, they find them in religious books, and many of them cannot throw off all the influence of an early evangelical education. Thirteen Unitarian churches, in these circumstances, and in a place where there are *twice* as many who hold opposing doctrines, and *four times* as many who belong to other sects that believe in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, have no right to claim the good morals and piety to be found in Boston, as the evidence of the moral tendencies of Unitarianism.

I should regard Boston as a place to test the moral tendencies of the *opposite* of Unitarianism, rather than to test the tendencies of Unitarianism in this country. Its tendencies have been tested elsewhere, but I have not the facts to illustrate satisfactorily the results.\*

Now it strikes me that Unitarianism is a system of faith, exactly suited to draw into its association one particular class of minds. It is those who are cultivated, and refined, and well educated, and

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\* In the Christian Spectator for March and June, 1830, will be found an account of the deplorable state of morals and religion in Geneva, (the birth place of Calvinism,) since Unitarianism has become dominant there.

moral ; who have too much conscience to live without any religion, and from the influence of education and other causes, too much reverence for the Bible to deny entirely its authority. Unitarianism furnishes them with a form of Christianity, that relieves them from the fears of eternal punishment for *any* course they may choose to follow, that makes safety *very hopeful* if they are as moral and exemplary as they find their education and taste makes it easy to be, and which does not exact any great and specific change of character, which they feel they have not experienced, as the indispensable means of future safety and happiness. If you collect together in a class, persons of this character, you will find much good taste, much refinement of sentiment and manners, regular habits that have been formed by education, correct notions of right and wrong in all dealings of man with man, a nice sense of honor, strict integrity, and all the amiable and domestic virtues. But, alas, I have seen all these things in Infidels and Atheists, and these *alone*, will not prove the existence of that principle of holiness, without which “no man shall see the Lord.”

Now for such a class of persons as I have described, I do not suppose *any* religion is of any great consequence, so far as this world is concerned. Their habits are formed, their moral taste, their sense of propriety, their self respect, their regard for the good opinion of men, their desire to preserve and promote whatever has a useful tendency, would save them from any great change in character and conduct, even were they to adopt the sentiments of the Atheist, and hold

that there is no accountability to any God, and that death is an eternal sleep.

And Boston is the place, where such tastes and habits, and education, and outward moral restraints, (thanks to our Puritan forefathers who made religion the *first* thing, and the cultivation of intellect the second,) are as extensively found, among all classes, as in any city of equal size; and where owing to the restraints of early education and habits, there is as large a class of the community, who could go on as safely and as long, without any religion at all, as can be found in any equally large place in the world. But when this class of persons, are called upon to educate another generation, and the strict notions of duty, and the solemn sanctions of religion, which, with such constant and all-pervading influences, encompassed their early way, and controlled the character and feelings of those who formed their tastes and habits and principles, have no longer any such power, then I think a difference will be seen. And this difference will be still more strongly exhibited when this second generation shall educate a third. Then will be the time to institute the comparison which now cannot be fairly made.

In regard to this whole matter of the moral tendencies of your religious system, and the duty of those who have such feelings and opinions as I have in regard to it, I think it may best be exhibited by an illustration. Suppose two ships were putting off to sea on a distant voyage, and both were very leaky, so that it would demand constant care and effort to carry them safely to port. The

company in one vessel, believed that there was a leak and that there were dangers; but those in the other did not believe in such dangers, and were determined never to examine the hold, or enquire into the matter, or do any thing in regard to it during the voyage. Now suppose I had friends on board each ship, and should be very much distressed about the prospects of the sceptical party, that were on board of one ship, and you should reason with me thus. “Do you think that God is going to make such a difference between two classes of persons just for their *belief*? People must believe according to the *evidence* they have before their minds; they cannot believe this and that, just as they please. One party has all the evidence of a leak and the other has not, and one honestly believes there is a leak, and the other does not, and each will act according to their notions of right. Now do you suppose that when both are equally honest and sincere, and act according to their belief, that a righteous God will punish one company with ruin, dismay and death, while the others, who are no more honest and sincere, will secure safety, happiness and a prosperous life?”

This would not satisfy me; I should still hope that one party would escape, and be distressed with fear that the others would perish. But you would still farther urge, “Are not those who do not believe there is a leak, just as amiable, as honest, as temperate, as intelligent, as sincere, as exemplary in all relative and social duties, and as faithful in supporting religion and all good institutions; and do you suppose that God who rules the

winds and waves, will punish one class with such a dreadful death, and so kindly bless and preserve the others, when they are no better, and some of them are worse, than many in the other ship ?”

This would give me no comfort or relief. Suppose I then, should attempt to persuade my friends of their danger, and should reason with them, and try every means in my power to induce them to go in the other ship, and you should remonstrate thus—“Why do you interfere in the faith of other people ? They are taught to think one way and you another, they belong to one party and you to another, why do you engage in a party quarrel, and try to get the crew of one ship into another ? Are you not tempting others to wrong feelings, generating a sectarian spirit, spreading confusion and disorder in a peaceful community, and inter-meddling with the business of other people ?” And suppose I were so engaged, and so really distressed as to implore, with streaming tears, my friends to hear of their danger, and in a moment of excitement, should feel indignant at those who were urging them to stay where they were, and then you should call me an overheated enthusiast, half crazy, and ready to burn with fire and faggots all who did not believe just as I did ; to what would it all amount, in the estimation of any reasonable bye-stander, who knew the exact state of the case and judged impartially ?

Now, my dear sir, I do honestly and sincerely believe that you and I, and all I hold dear, are embarked in a voyage as dangerous, for eternity, as

one in a leaky vessel is, for this life ; and I believe that our safety depends on the *efforts* we make, and that these efforts are proportioned to our *sense of the danger*. And when I see a company of friends and fellow beings resting in a system of faith, that takes away fears of danger, and right views of what is necessary to be done, in order to secure safety, I cannot be quieted by the plea that they are honest in their belief, and that they were educated in one faith, and I in another, and that they are as amiable and exemplary as those who differ from them, and that it is sectarianism and party spirit, which stimulates my feelings and efforts, and that I am an enthusiast, or a bigot, or have the spirit of a persecutor. All these things may be said to me, or about me, and yet every fair minded, reasonable man would say, that so long as I *believe* what I profess, kindness and humanity and christianity, all demand that I should use every means in my power, to convince and persuade all who are thus endangered, to embark in the ark, that bears my own hopes and treasures for eternity. Alas ! I fear there is much more occasion for you to urge the objection, (and I doubt if you have not sometimes done it, for men are not always *consistent* in their objections to the views I hold.) that it is strange, if we believe and feel as we profess, that so little is said and done, to show the reality of our belief and feelings. But here I would urge, as a palliation for what is a much juster ground of objection, the very difficulties suggested in the previous remarks ; the com-

mon suspicion that all efforts existed by Christian feeling, are the results of sectarian and party spirit ; the unwillingness of men to be convinced that they are wrong or in danger ; the universal feeling that religion may not be urged on the attention by any one who is not either a clergyman, or an intimate personal friend ; and the great difficulty of doing it at just such a time and place, and in just such a manner, as will not do more harm than good. I do assure you, Sir, that persons of my faith are, thousands of times, withheld from speaking on what interests them most, from the fear that by an appearance of sectarianism, or of officiousness, or of obtrusive interference with opinions, feelings that are deemed sacred, or of assuming to be wiser and better than those whom they would address, they might not only do no good, but real injury. None but those who feel such deep interests, and know the difficulties of manifesting them properly ; who have experienced the shrinking feeling that arises when we fear our most deep and sacred sympathies will be misunderstood and unappreciated, can understand the palliations that might be urged, for the little interest manifested by those who profess to believe, that so many of their fellow men are encountering such terrific hazards. Often while the smile of social cheerfulness dwells on the countenance, and the usual courtesies and conversation of society are going on, the heart struggles to forget what it does no good to remember, and the Christian friend de-



parts to bear to Him who seeth in secret, the anxious hopes and fears he cannot speak to man.

And do you ask me here, as I have sometimes been asked, how I can have any comfort or peace with such a faith as mine? Did you ever in childhood find yourself in a situation of anxiety and dismay, without knowing what to do, or where to turn, and suddenly find your *father* appear to your aid? Do you remember the ease, the confidence, the comfort his superior wisdom, power and goodness brought to your mind? This but shadows forth that peace of mind which is felt by those whose souls are stayed on God.

In this connection I would urge an inquiry, which has often been painfully pressed upon my mind. Why, if Unitarians believe that those who are honest and sincere in their religious belief, are safe in the orthodox faith—why, if they see that morality is not destroyed by the weight of such solemn and thrilling sanctions, but is sustained, with at least equal power as it is among Unitarians, do they hazard the peace of community, and distress the hearts of parents, families and friends, by attempting to propagate opinions which are deemed so dangerous? Why, if there is no such danger for *eternity*, do they distress, and perplex, and harrass those from whom they differ in time? They know that those who adopt my faith in sincerity, feel touched in their tenderest and most sacred interests, when their families and friends are tempted to a course, which it is feared will end in the ruin of the soul forever. They have no

such strong motives to urge them to extend their views of truth. They are tempted, indeed, as all others are, to build up their own sect, and make themselves more weighty and respectable, by increasing their number and influence. But this is no proper reason for inflicting such evils on the community, as always arise, when they attempt to win to their side, the children and friends of those, who regard their ways as the ways of danger and death. If they do not like to hear the doctrines which they do not believe, they can have their own preachers; but why seek to increase their numbers by means that wring the hearts of hundreds, and set the community all in excitement and contention? I respect the consistency of Catholics, in proselyting. If I believed as they do, that no man could be saved out of their church, I would do as they do, persuade who I could, and *force* when I must, for a *consistent Catholic must* be a persecutor, whenever he has the power. But how different the case of a Unitarian, who thinks all are safe, so long as they are sincere.

There is one other point on which I would remark. When I talk with serious Unitarians, and describe what I mean by true piety, they say they mean the same thing, and that they believe and are taught, that men ought to become pious in this sense. And when I read their most popular theological and devotional writings, they certainly do urge this duty, as of the first importance and obligation.

But then the inquiry arises, *what if men do not*

*become pious*, what evil will happen to them? Suppose a man lives a moral, amiable, exemplary life, and does not possess this principle of piety, which they enforce as so important, what will be the consequences? Why, so far as I can learn from them, *nobody knows*. They can only say, it is better to have piety than to be without it—both for time and for eternity. I should think any reasonable man would know, without a Revelation, that a virtuous and pious man would be happier, so long as he exists, than if he were not virtuous and pious.

Now the great *practical* difficulty about Unitarianism is, that all moral men, though they think piety a very desirable thing, feel that they shall have a fair chance for eternity without it; and even those who are not strictly moral in every respect, feel but little more anxiety. Unitarianism destroys *the fear of evil consequences from neglect of duty*, that universal stimulus to effort, so necessary, even in temporal duties; so much more necessary in reference to duties relating to invisible things, which are realized only by faith. Now you will see just the effects that might be expected, on Unitarian teachers and Unitarian hearers. Why should men trouble themselves, when there is little danger? And so you find them little anxious for the future state. Their clergymen, when they have set before their flock the excellence of virtue, and the beauty and obligations of piety, feel that their work is done. They do not set about their labors as if they had some definite object to accom-

plish in regard to each individual member of their charge. They do not feel it a duty to know whether each one of their flock has that character, that fits for heaven; and if they have not, to try to induce them to assume it *immediately*. When a man is amiable and exemplary in their flock, they do not feel called upon to ascertain whether he is pious, and urge this duty upon him. When a man is moral, upright and amiable, little anxiety is felt by clergymen or friends for his piety, or for his safety. When such a man dies, his piety is not questioned, nor any fears allowed for his future state. Every thing seems to go on, under the general impression, that if a man is honest, amiable and moral, it is enough to relieve from all fears for the future.

But with those who believe in the eternal sanctions of religion as I believe them, and hold that piety is the *only* means of securing future safety, every thing has a different impress. Ministers feel that they have a definite duty to urge; those who are without piety are made to understand their deficiency and the danger it involves; and every thing moves on as if there was something to be done, and to be done *immediately*, to secure eternal life and escape eternal death. Those who believe that every man had a fixed and definite character; that every man is a man of piety, or is not; that if he is not, he ought to become so *immediately*; and that every influence which is calculated to lead to this result should be immediately applied; must be stimulated to feelings and activity, which cannot arouse a class,

who do not know whether there is any danger of losing endless enjoyment, and suffering endless misery ; who do not know what is the thing demanded to secure future safety ; who have no data for knowing when a man is safe, and when he is not.

This is the reason why Unitarianism is called a cold, an indifferent, a heartless faith. It is a faith that releases men from their fears, and in which every thing falls into that stupor, which always benumbs efforts, when little evil is apprehended from neglect. I have one or two other topics which I wish to touch upon before we close, but I will defer them for another letter.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XXI.

MY DEAR SIR,

I wish, in the first place, to say a few words on that matter of "charity," so often claimed as the distinctive characteristic of your sect, and in which their opponents are deemed so deficient. It seems to me there are two senses in which this term is employed. In one use it signifies, that spirit of love to God and man which is described in the Epistle to the Corinthians; which always predisposes a mind under its influence, to put the best construction on the motives, conduct, and character of our fellow men; which is pleased at the discovery of all that is good, and is pained at finding evil in others; which operates like sincere friendship, in making it pleasant to speak of the excellencies and painful to expose the faults of others. It is a principle which when in full exercise, can do entire justice to an opposer, or even an enemy. It is that benevolent spirit which hopeth all things that are favorable, which endureth all things with kindness and patience, which thinketh no evil with-

out abundant cause, which rejoiceth not in the iniquity of those who are opposers, but rather rejoiceth in the truth.

There is another sense in which charity is used, which seems to signify, little confidence in our own views of truth, and a hope that all who are honest and sincere in their religious belief, however erroneous it may be, will secure eternal happiness. Perhaps I am mistaken in supposing that this last is the sense in which it is frequently used. I now simply ask, which do you suppose to be the charity christianity requires, and which is it that you and others have eulogized as belonging peculiarly to your sect, and as wanting in that to which I belong?

I ask now in regard to myself; suppose that I hold myself accountable to none but God for my religious opinions, and that I take the Bible alone as my guide. Suppose that after faithful examination I honestly and sincerely come to the full conviction, that certain doctrines constitute Christianity, in distinction from Judaism, or Deism, so that all who deny these doctrines deny Christianity. Suppose I also believe the Bible teaches, that those who deny these doctrines of Christianity, shall not be invited to the communion table as Christians, nor their clergy be recognized as ministers of Jesus Christ. Suppose I really believe thus and act in agreement with my principles, and yet that I maintain such a spirit towards those I thus exclude, as enables me fairly to appreciate all their good qualities, to love what is amiable, to admire what is ex-

cellent, to honor what is upright, to put the best rather than the worst construction on their motives and conduct, to defend their good name, to speak of their excellencies rather than of their defects, to treat them with kindness and respect, and to seek and pray for their best interests both for time and for eternity. Suppose I do all this, must I be condemned as wanting in Christian charity, because I honestly believe that the Bible forbids me to acknowledge their tenets as the doctrines of Christianity, and their clergy as the teachers of Christianity? Would not this be condemnation for believing a certain creed? What is there that your sect deems of more value in Christian character than charity, and if you deny me this, simply because I believe the Bible teaches that you are wrong, and that I must not by word or action allow that you are right, would you not deny to me the most essential and valuable trait of Christian character, simply because I believe a different creed from what you do?

Now I do not wish to make any invidious comparisons, but I think I may with propriety say as much as this, that I have read very extensively on both sides of the Unitarian controversy, and that I have many acquaintances on both sides, and I never perceived any such distinguishing marks of forbearance, patience, kindness, and love on the part of Unitarians, as makes it right to claim for them *distinctive* merit on this point. I never perceived that they were distinguished above other sects, for putting the best rather than the worst construction



on the motives and conduct of their opponents; thinking no evil; rejoicing not in the iniquity discovered in opponents, but rather rejoicing in the truth. I never perceived that they were more distinguished than others, for bearing patiently with those who conscientiously believe that they hold fatal errors, which it is a duty both to exhibit and to oppose. At any rate, I may claim that it is not so much a distinguishing trait that it is either suitable or wise to make a boast of it, and draw invidious comparisons as to the deficiencies of opponents in this respect.

And yet, it seems to me, there is one reason why Unitarians ought to have more of this patience and forbearance, than other sects, and that is, because they are not so strongly tempted to the contrary. A man's temptations to evil feelings are proportioned to the value of his interests and the strength of his feelings, on those points where he is opposed or thwarted. Now those who really believe that their friends and fellow beings are exposed to eternal ruin, and that it is a *knowledge* and *belief of the truth* which is to be the means of their eternal safety, have much more reason to feel strongly, than those who are uncertain whether men are exposed to such terrific hazards, and at the same time think, that whatever the dangers are, honesty and sincerity in belief will secure safety.

Why should men who hold such views feel any great anxiety as to what opinions prevail in society, or are adopted by their friends? They may, indeed, equally with others, be excited to promote

their own influence and respectability, by increasing the numbers and wealth and influence of their sect, but if honesty and sincerity in belief will secure salvation, they have no cause for anxiety in regard to the eternal safety and happiness of their friends and fellow men. How much more strongly tempted are those, who really believe that correct views of the truth are the means of salvation, and that the safety of those they love diminishes just in proportion as error is embraced and believed. All that is amiable in humanity, all that is sacred in religious obligation, all that is tender in parental, filial and fraternal love, are called into action in meeting and opposing what it is feared may ruin the best interest of so many they love, and carry eternal ruin to multitudes that might otherwise be saved.

If you had seen as I have, the distress that has been brought upon parents, wives, children and friends by the advance of what they deemed fatal errors, you would think, that it is much easier for those who believe as you do, to maintain a proper spirit towards those who are laboring to disseminate opposing sentiments, than for those who hold my views of religious truth.

The next point I would touch upon is the manner in which it is common among your party to talk against *creeds*. Now every man has a creed, if he has any belief at all; the only difference is, that some include more articles and some less, some one thing and some another in their creeds. But all the world divide into parties which are united up-

on certain points of agreement, and insist upon it that agreement with their creed, shall be the ground of admission or exclusion from the community. And Unitarians do it as much as any sect. Although a Mahometan believes as they do, that there is but one God, without any Trinity, and that Jesus Christ is his Messenger, yet no Unitarian will allow that a Mahometan is a Christian. He must take more articles into his creed, or else be excluded from the Unitarian community. No Mahometan doctor would be allowed to exchange with a Unitarian clergyman, or be received at the communion table, without general displeasure at the impropriety.

The orthodox man has a little longer creed, and has more articles that he deems essential to Christianity, and he takes the same liberty as the Unitarian. But here the Unitarian demurs, and denies the right, and murmurs at creeds and uncharitableness. What just cause of complaint has he, unless he denies that the orthodox man has a right to form a creed of his own, and insists that no more doctrines shall be included as essential to Christianity, than cuts off the Mahometan.

True, creeds have been abused, like all other good things. Harsh and invidious language, unchristian feelings, impeachment of motives, gross personalities, and often an overbearing and denouncing spirit have attended the propagation and defence of creeds. But evil in this world has always attended every good institution. A creed is designed as a symbol of *peace and agreement*, not

of war. All mankind differ in the most important matters. Creeds are held up, to draw off into different families, those that think alike and can thus dwell in peace, instead of leaving men of all varieties of religious faith to dwell in one enclosure, forever tempted to contend, as to who should have pre-eminence, and whose views should be taught, and whose rites and forms of church government should have the preference.

It seems to me as unwise to rail at creeds, because evils attend them, as to denounce the marriage state because of the evils that accompany it. It is better to have the marriage state, with all its evils, than to be without it, and so, it is far better to have creeds to divide men into separate communities, than that all varieties of faith should strive to dwell in one enclosure.

The thing to be aimed at, is to try to lessen the attendant evils, rather than to abuse the thing itself; and when the spirit of Jesus Christ, and that true charity he inculcates, dwell in the bosoms of men, creeds may still be retained, but all the evils will cease.

With the denouncing of creeds, I often meet disparaging remarks as to the intellectual bondage of those who are held by them. Now, that a man may *have* a creed, and demand that all who join his sect, shall subscribe to it, is not the sole proof of this bondage, because it is allowed that all men demand this in some sort; even Unitarians themselves. It is those who deny that Unitarians are Christians, who are the particular objects of these

remarks, and it is in reference to them that I have so often in Unitarian publications, and in conversation with that sect, heard such comparisons made as imply that Unitarians are peculiar in daring to think for themselves; in forming their own opinions from personal investigation, and not taking them on trust; in not being bound by the prejudices of education and the fear of popular prejudice. Now I am acquainted with some leading minds on both sides; I have heard Unitarians of all classes express their religious views, and have questioned some of those who seem to feel this self confidence on this matter. But I never found any evidence of superior or more extensive investigation, than I often find among my orthodox friends. I do not perceive in conversation with those who often make such remarks, any evidence of such very thorough and extensive examination, as puts all other denominations so very much in the shade.

I do not deny that great multitudes who hold the faith that I do, take it on trust; that by far too many do this. But I believe that, to say the least, there are *as many* who dare to think for themselves, who investigate both sides, who examine fairly, candidly and fearlessly, among those who are not of the Unitarian faith, as there are among those who embrace it. At any rate, I have never seen any proof to the contrary, but much in favor of it; and I do not know what is the data on which Unitarians rest their deduction, that they are the sect peculiar for independent, unshackled investigation, and for freedom from the prejudices of party, edu-

cation, and other influences that are apt to bias the judgment.

Another point where I wish to plead the cause of my friends, against what I deem unjust implication, is in regard to that "persecuting spirit" so frequently charged upon them. How often have I heard the changes rung on this idea, that though the faggot and the prison were not at the command of zealots at the present day, the spirit of persecution is rife among those, who are urging on the efforts to prevent the extension of heresy; and broad intimation that hanging and burning would be resorted to, were the power only allowed. Now it is the leaders of a party that must have this spirit the most strongly, if it exist any where; for they are the persons, whose minds are most excited by contest and collision. But it has been my lot, in the controversy which has been going on for a few years past, to be on terms of intimacy with the greater part of those who thus rank as leaders, in opposing the progress of Unitarian sentiments. I have heard them talk over their plans, express their most undisguised feelings, and that too at seasons of highest interest and excitement. Yet, I do assure you, I never have seen the man among these leaders, who I thought had any such feelings as are charged to them. I never saw or heard any thing, that seemed to indicate revengeful, malignant, or vindictive feelings; nothing that would prevent them from doing personal acts of kindness and charity to every one whose efforts they were opposing. I have seen great excitement of feeling, at what was

deemed most disastrous to the best interests of society, and to the eternal hopes of man ; I have seen them feel as good men ought to feel, when guarding the interests of all most dear to them, from what they deemed reckless, needless and disastrous influences ; and I have at times seen them indignant and impatient. I have sometimes read controversial writings where there was more severity, satire and implication of motives than I think is right. But if the opposers of Unitarianism honestly *believe* what they profess, about the danger of error to the souls of men, they can take all the *measures* they have taken, consistently with the purest motives and the most benevolent feelings. Does not charity demand the best, rather than the worst construction of their motives and feelings ? They *may* indeed be influenced by party spirit, the love of power, the pride of opinion, and the vindictive spirit of revenge ; but they *may* also be influenced by far better and purer feelings, and yet pursue *exactly the same course*. Why cannot their opponents, who claim so much charity, put the most favorable construction, rather than the worst, upon their motives and feelings ?

It seems to me that true liberality and freedom of opinion and discussion is not yet fully understood, even by some of its warmest advocates. Men who are the loudest in their demands for charity and freedom of opinion, will tolerate Unitarianism, Universalism, Deism, Atheism, any thing and every thing that may claim public attention. But they will not allow, that good men may

try to stop the progress of what they deem pernicious errors, even if they honestly believe they ought to do it. They insist upon it, a man has no right to believe that it is his duty to expose error and show the evil tendencies of the opinions and practices of those who differ from himself. If a man attempts this, be it only with fair argument and candid appeals to facts, instantly the hue and cry is raised, "bigotry, persecution, flames, faggots, bolts and chains!" But is it not right, is it not a duty, when we believe men are leading others to destruction by false reasoning or false principles, to try to expose these errors, and if in doing it, we make their opinions and party unpopular, is this a reason for holding our peace? Now the very persons who most bitterly complain of such a course, do exactly the same thing themselves, and without any suspicion that they are guilty of the same sort of bigotry and persecution, of which they complain. When Fanny Wright travelled through the country, delivering lectures that tended to destroy reverence for God, and the most sacred institutions of domestic life, almost all serious Unitarians united, not merely to show the sophistry of her arguments, but to make her unpopular and disreputable. You did this. You would not countenance her by hearing her lectures. You would not read her books, nor let your children read them. And yet, you once told me you believed she was a visionary enthusiast, impelled by the zeal of a theorizer and reformer, rather than a woman led on by vicious propensities. But her honesty



and sincerity made no difference with you, nor with serious Unitarians. You did not scruple to take every suitable measure to make her appear ridiculous, and her opinions unpopular; and you justified this course, by asserting your opinion of the dangerous tendencies of her sentiments.

Now suppose your clergyman should suddenly embrace the opinions of Fanny Wright, and insist upon urging them in his pulpit. You would instantly join in ejecting him from his pulpit, take away his salary, and thus injure his respectability and influence, and probably reduce him to poverty; and that too, when you were convinced he honestly believed every word he taught. But suppose more than half his people, by his secret influences, had been brought to believe as he did, who then should have the church? You would claim it; you would say it was built for Christian teaching, and not for Atheists. And though he and his advocates might by sophistry, make themselves think it honest and right to retain the pulpit and church, yet if any legal means could eject them, you would not hesitate to use them; and were you deprived of your rights entirely, you would endeavor by the power of public sentiment to put down the dangerous teacher of Atheism, and the usurper of rights and property devoted to opposite purposes.

And this is the principle on which you would act, that when men embrace and endeavor to propagate opinions injurious to the interests of society, it is the duty of all good citizens to throw the whole weight of their influence against them; to make their opinions appear absurd and discreditable, and

if possible to use legal means to prevent their usurping the places and property, devoted to the extension of opposing sentiments.

It is on this principle, by which you would justify the ejection of an Atheist from a Christian pulpit, and his Atheistical supporters from the rights of church property, that I would justify the measures used by men who sincerely believe Unitarianism to be in reality nothing but refined Deism, in opposing its extension, and in their endeavors to retain in their own possession, the churches and property devoted to the extension of doctrines directly opposed to Unitarianism. And I do not see how you can with any consistency deny the propriety of this course, except by denying their right to think for themselves, and asserting that they are bound to think as Unitarians do, on matters of doctrine and duty.\*

It is a fact, that orthodox Christians do consider Unitarianism no better, and but little different from the best sort of Deism, and that they believe there is no more propriety in their claiming church

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\* A part of the endowments of Cambridge College, now devoted to the support of Unitarian Theological Professors, were given with the express stipulation, that the funds should be used only for the support of men of Evangelical or orthodox sentiments. Much church property, which was given by Evangelical Christians for the support of Evangelical preaching, has been taken, and is now used by Unitarians, on the plea that *the church* signifies all persons who join a religious community, and worship together. In this way, by bringing in Unitarians or persons indifferent to any religion, as voters in a society, the church property has repeatedly passed into the hands of Unitarians, who then appointed a Unitarian clergyman in the place of the Evangelical preacher, contrary to the wishes of the church. In New England, from the first, *the church*, in distinction from *the society*, has consisted of persons enrolled as professing piety.

property, sacramental furniture and college endowments, given by orthodox men, for the propagation of views exactly opposed to Unitarianism, than you would think there was in an Atheist minister and his followers, gaining a majority in a Unitarian church, and ejecting all the Unitarians, or allowing them to remain only, on condition that they listen to Atheistical lectures every Sunday. If there is any difference in the two cases I cannot see where it is.

You deny that Atheism is Christianity. You believed that it tends to injure both the temporal and eternal interests of society, and therefore you justify yourself in trying to make it appear not only false, but odious and unpopular. But when men think the same of your opinions, you deem it persecution even for them to attempt to show the injurious tendencies of your faith, while if many of the means you would not hesitate to use against Fanny Wright, (and which I would not have used against Unitarians.) were employed against your sect, I fear you would not speak, even as temperately as you now do on the subject.

The truth is, that it is a necessary consequence of having a community hold one set of opinions, that the few who hold the opposite, must meet the discountenance of the many; particularly if great interests are involved; and it seems strange to me that reasonable and candid men, who in all other cases justify this necessity, cannot feel it, when they themselves stand in the unpopular minority. All they have a right to ask, is a *fair chance*,

by argument and persuasion to defend themselves, and if practicable to gain proselytes, till they can make themselves respectable, at least by numbers and influence. This ought to be allowed to all men, perhaps even to the *one woman*, who has entered the public arena, as the avowed advocate of truth and human rights.

Now will you tell me, my friend, whether it is not fair and honorable and christian, for any man to try to convince the public of the evil and danger of every thing he believes to be an evil? And is it right to blame him in this course, unless he either is guilty of unfair reasoning, of false statements, or of a bitter and unchristian spirit, or of a coarse, rude, or offensive manner? If he shows what he deems wrong and injurious, in a calm, kind, and christian way; reasons fairly, states well supported facts, uses no opprobrious epithets, and impeaches no man's motives, is he not to be justified, is he not to be honored for this course? And even if he fails in some of these respects, should not his mistakes or false reasonings be pointed out with a spirit of kindness, courtesy and candor, instead of denouncing him as a bigoted zealot, or a fiery persecutor? Will the day ever come, when men will patiently bear to be told they are in the wrong, and kindly and patiently meet the efforts that may be made to try to convince themselves and others of it? It will be the last triumph of Christianity over the wayward pride and selfishness of man!

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XXII.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your wish to know what I think of the “revivals of religion” so common in my sect, and you present various queries in regard to them.

It is a subject of great interest and importance, to which I might devote many pages, before I could tell you *all* that I think about them. But I will state a few things for your consideration.

You know that every thing good is liable to abuse, and that there is no blessing which has not some attendant evils. You know also, that religion does not confer good judgment or good taste, nor free men from temptation to ill feelings, when they are crossed in their opinions and views of duty. You know, that in judging of what it is right to hazard, as to health and the interruption of our regular duties, very much depends upon the *interests that are risked*. It is right for a physician to stay out nights, to go through storms, and to do without sleep in cases of sickness and danger,

when it would be folly and wickedness to do it, to gain amusement, or trifling emolument.

Remember, then, that these are my principles ; that all mankind are in danger of *eternal ruin* ; that securing true piety is the *only* method of safety, and that this is generally attained in a course of attendance on religious instruction. Of course nothing is of so much consequence as religious instruction, and hazards may be incurred to gain eternal life, that might not be right for any other object. Bear these things in mind then, while I for a moment touch on the several topics, that usually are matters of reproach or difficulty, on this subject.

The first is, that a system of means is employed to awaken attention and excite interest, and that this, which is the work of man, is ascribed to the Spirit of God. Here I reply, that it is as I believe, by the Word of Truth, that the Spirit of God is wont to bring the mind of man to reflection, and to efforts in performing duty, and therefore, the more plainly, powerfully, and continuously the motives of religion are urged upon attention, the more reason there is to expect super natural aid.

Next comes the differences that exist about the *proper means* to use, in calling attention to religion, and in bringing its motives to bear on the mind. But is there any thing about which men do not differ ? I should like to hear of one single thing. And while men are so differently endowed with discretion, education, taste and experience, it would be a miracle if all should think alike on this subject.

Next comes the injury done to health and reason, by these seasons of excitement. Here I would first suggest, that it is an object for which it is right to run more risks than for any other ; and secondly, that the evils are very much exaggerated. I believe that for the last twenty years, I have not passed two consecutive years, without being in a revival *some where*, and hearing and knowing most that transpired ; and yet I have never known but *one person* whose reason was at all affected by the excitement of such a season. And if you will examine the statistics of our insane retreats, in a part of the country where revivals most abound, you will find, that though religion *ought* to be more interesting to every mind than any thing else, yet the victims of intemperance in study, intemperance in business, and intemperance in drink, each exceed the number of those, who have been injured by excessive attention to religion. On this subject, men who are sceptical as to the nature of religion and revivals, do not seem to know that religion often brings a *peace* to the mind that the world cannot give, and the more our interests are fixed in heaven, the less we are agitated by the vicissitudes and cares of life.

Next come the abuses that occur in revivals, the style of preaching, the methods of dealing with those who are interested, and other objections of this kind. I suppose these also are much exaggerated. You know there has been much effort made to prevent excesses, and in doing it, all the excesses that could be collected have been

sought out, and exhibited by the friends of religion, as well as by its enemies.

This has given a fine field for reaping, to the enemies of religion and of revivals. But it is a distorted picture, when these things are all collected in one view, and the palliations, attending circumstances, and beneficial results are omitted. What would men think of medical science, if all the mistakes of inexperienced physicians and ignorant quacks were brought into one picture, and all the benefits of the profession omitted?

Now there are men of ardent temperament, uncultivated taste,<sup>f</sup> and little experienced, who are unaccustomed to notice the *general tendencies* of measures, and who look only at immediate results. Such persons practice and defend many things that are in very bad taste, that are very injudicious, and sometimes very wrong. But the good sense of the religious community generally is against them, and though such indiscretions may prevail for a short time, in limited spheres, public sentiment soon rectifies the evils. The immense majority of ministers, who conduct religious exercises in revivals, are opposed to anything different in measures or behavior, from the ordinary decorum and regularity of public worship, at other times. I have never heard such kinds of preaching as Unitarians, and the other opposers of revivals, generally suppose is employed, to excite animal feelings. I have never heard groans and outcries in a religious meetings, and I never but once in a revival, witnessed the calling of individuals



from a congregation to take a particular seat, as objects of attention and subjects of prayer; and that was not in New England, where revivals have been the most frequent. In all revivals that I have known, serious, solemn and earnest appeals to the reason, conscience and the heart, have been the only means employed, and *stillness, and fixed attention*, have been the most common indication of feeling that could be observed.

In such revivals, I have known the blasphemer and the infidel silenced, convinced, and brought to believe and obey the truths, they once ridiculed and despised. I have known the intemperate man reformed, the licentious reclaimed, and the negligent, indolent and prodigal husband and father turned to the faithful discharge of his domestic duties. I have seen the man of profound learning, the man of acute logical powers, the man of brilliant wit, the man of solid, clear, discriminating sense, suddenly changed from a course of worldliness, to a deep, abiding, and consistent interest in religion and its duties. I have seen men at such times, made better husbands, better fathers, better citizens and better friends. I have seen vice and folly sink away, and every virtue bloom and flourish, under the influences of such revivals, as are often the theme of merriment and scorn, even to men who claim to respect religion, and to wish well to the best interests of man. And the evils that attend such seasons, so far as I have ever had a chance to observe, are as a drop in the bucket, compared with the good. I know Unitarian cler-

gyman who I believe are conscientiously and sincerely devoted to their profession, and who really wish to lead their people to become both virtuous and pious. I only wish that such men could be placed where they could know all about revivals, as I have witnessed them, and as they usually appear, when men of discretion and piety direct religious exercises. I am very sure that their prejudices would speedily be removed, and that they would perceive with deep interest, how much more effectual it proves, to urge the *motives of the gospel* on the reason, and conscience, and heart, than merely to teach men what are their moral and religious duties, let it be done ever so plainly and so rationally.

In reply to the question, why, if revivals are such a blessing, are they confined so much to certain portions of the country, and to certain sects. I reply, that I believe they are dependent for existence, and continuance, not only on Divine influence, but on the faithfulness and clearness with which the peculiar motives of the gospel are urged on the consciences of men ; for the Spirit of God co-operates with the Word of Truth in bringing men to the obedience of faith ; and when the gospel is not preached, revivals will not take place, and the more powerfully, plainly, and faithfully it is urged, the more frequently such manifestations of Divine aid will appear. Revivals are not confined to one or two sects. All the Evangelical sects have to a greater or less extent, enjoyed such periods of unusual interest and attention to reli-

gion, in all ages of the world. You will find records of such seasons in various countries, and various sects, and at various periods. They have increased at the present age in power and frequency, because as I suppose, ministers and private Christians, have become more diligent and faithful in efforts to extend a knowledge of the Gospel, and bring its truths to bear more frequently and forcibly on the minds of their fellow men.

These are the few remarks which I have to offer. May God lead you into all truth, and bring you to his heavenly kingdom.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XXIII.

(TO ANOTHER PERSON.)

MY DEAR SIR,

Your request that I would explain to you the real points of difficulty and disagreement that now agitate the Presbyterian church, I could not comply with at the time, for I found it would demand more thought and discrimination, to make the matter clear to a mind not familiar with these discussions, than I could command, except in my chamber, and with a pen in my hand. I will now attempt to comply with your wishes.

I must first state some things as preliminaries. You will find all Christians divided into two great classes, on the fundamental question, "what must we do to be saved?" One class consists of those who claim that *true piety*, which consists in giving to God the first place in our affections, and his service the first place in our interests and efforts, is the only and indispensable condition of eternal life; so that all who die, without this character, will be sinful and miserable forever. All who hold

this sentiment are classed under the term, *Evangelical Christians*, and it includes in this country the Baptists, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Episcopalians, the Orthodox Quakers, the Dutch, Associate and German Reformed, and most of the Protestant foreigners.

The sects who are included in the other class, are the Universalists, who do not believe that men are in any danger of being *lost forever*, and therefore do not suppose that they need to do any thing to be saved; the Unitarians, who do not know whether men are in such danger, and of course do not know whether they need to do any thing to be saved from it; and the Catholics, who hold that membership in the Catholic church is indispensable to salvation, so that none can be saved out of it. Their clergy may often teach the duty of piety; but a round of ceremonies, confession and penance, the prayers of saints, good works, and a period of suffering in purgatory, are what are generally relied on in that church, as the means of securing eternal life. These include the most of those who are not deemed Evangelical in this country. I suppose the Hicksite Quakers and the Campbelite Baptists come into the same class as the Unitarians, though I am not well acquainted with their peculiar views.

There are some few other sects, such as the Swedenborginans many of whose peculiarities I cannot comprehend, and the Mormons and Shakers, whose views I have not learned.

The Evangelical Christians, are not divided into sects, on matters of doctrinal belief, but merely on

matters of organization, church government, and external rites.

The peculiarity that distinguishes Congregationalism, is the mode of church government. Each individual church is an independant body, responsible to no other body, and settling all its concerns by the majority of voters.

An independent Presbyterian church is exactly the same thing, except that the church manages its concerns by *permanent* officers, who are called elders of the church.

But Presbyterianism in this country generally, has this, as one peculiarity. Each church is governed by its own officers, and is connected with a Presbytery, composed of the neighboring ministers and elders, who receive appeals and have a right to reverse the decisions of each individual church connected with it, and the care and supervision of each clergyman, also, connected with it. Each Presbytery is connected with a Synod, composed of delegates from several Presbyteries, that receives appeals, and has a right to reverse the decisions of each of its Presbyteries. Then there is the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, composed of delegates from all the Presbyteries, which is the ultimate court of appeal, and has authority to settle *finally*, all questions that are appealed, either from Synods or Presbyteries.

The peculiarities of the Episcopal church, consist in its mode of worship, and in the three orders of clergy, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; and

certain views in regard to the rite of ordination.

The Baptists are just like the Congregationalists, except that they differ as to the *time and mode* of administering the rite of baptism.

The Methodists are more like the Episcopalians in their notions of church government, and differ in their mode of worship, and the general arrangement and discipline of their church.

The remaining sects differ from Presbyterians, chiefly as to the forms of church government and external rites.

All these Evangelical sects are united in believing and teaching the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice, to save from future punishment, all who devote to Him the love of the heart, and the service of the life. They unite in believing that the *sanction* of the law and gospel, is *eternal ruin*, to all who die without this indispensable preparation for a future state. They all acknowledge their entire dependence on the Holy Spirit for all holy desires, right purposes, and acceptable service, and they all believe that it is by the Word of Truth, or the motives and sanctions of the gospel, that the Spirit acts to regenerate and purify. They all acknowledge it to be their duty, to aid in spreading the knowledge of the gospel through all lands, and are united in efforts to promote this great object. The *distinctive* peculiarities that *divide them into sects*, do not relate to the truths or doctrines of religion, but only to external rites and forms.

Still there are some diversities of opinion among them, on certain matters of faith, though it does not serve to divide them into different denominations, but exist among individuals of all these sects. This diversity of opinion will again be found to relate to the grand question "what must we do to be saved?" Here there are two extremes to which individuals in each denomination are suspected of diverging. One extreme is, a belief that piety or true religion consists in some sudden mysterious change in the human mind, which cannot be explained to an unrenewed person, and which such a person cannot understand; that this change is wrought by the Spirit of God, and the evidence of it exists only in the consciousness of the individual. Good works, and a blameless life, are not demanded as evidence, and are deemed of little consequence. This is called the extreme of *Antinomianism*.

The other extreme is this. It consists in the belief, that man has a germ of true religion in his heart by nature, and that by education and various external influences, it can be perfected and matured, without any supernatural aid from the Holy Spirit, so that children can be made Christians by education and by the performance of certain external rites of the church, which God blesses to that end, while a good moral life is considered as piety. This is called the extreme of *Arminianism*.

The Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist churches are often charged with verging to the Antinomian extreme, and the Episcopal of tending



to the Arminian extreme, and the Methodists of making the excitement of animal feeling the chief evidence of piety. How far there is truth in any of these charges, I am not qualified to decide.

But I suppose that most religious teachers in all these denominations, would unite in this statement of their views; that true piety consists in the devotion of the heart and life to God and his service; that men come into the world destitute of this principle, and live to please and serve themselves and the world, rather than God. That whenever a change of the natural character of man takes place, it is by the instrumentality of the truths contained in the Bible, made effectual by the supernatural influence of the Spirit of God; and that the chief evidence of piety before men, is the profession of it by the individual himself, and a corresponding improvement in his character and life.

This I suppose the two conflicting parties in the Presbyterian church would assent to, as expressing their views of doctrine. The place where they differ, so far as I can discover, is on a question of *mental philosophy*, relating to the constitutional character of the human mind.

One class suppose that the mind of man is so constituted by nature, that it loves to do wrong rather than to do right; that there is a natural aversion to the character of God when truly seen, as much as there is to what is distorted or deformed in nature and art. They suppose that many of the natural desires and affections of the human mind, that arise involuntarily, are wrong,

and that man by his own choice or efforts, has no power to change this natural constitution. They suppose that until this constitution of mind is changed, it is as impossible for a man to love God, and to devote his heart and will to his service, as it is for him to make a mountain or a world. They suppose that the mind always chooses those things most agreeable to the natural constitutional tastes, so that when virtue and holiness are presented to the mind, there is no taste or desire for it, and when sinful things are presented, there is a desire for them, and that the choice as necessarily follows the strongest desire, as the needle follows the attraction of the strongest magnet. They suppose regeneration, or the commencement of piety in the mind, to consist in a change in this mental constitution, wrought by the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, and that after this change, men have power to love holiness and to dislike sin.

On the contrary, those who hold the other theory of mental constitution, maintain that men are made with the natural desire for happiness and fear of suffering, and that all their acts of choice have reference to gaining, the one, or avoiding the other. That they do not like a thing because it is wrong, or dislike it because it is holy, but they like what gratifies their desires, and dislike what crosses them. That there are a great variety of sources of enjoyment, and that men have the power to choose or refuse any one of them, and to take some one or the other, as the leading object of interest and pursuit. That the mind is made so as to be able to

understand, admire and love the character of God, and to perceive the excellency and happiness of living to do good to others, instead of being supremely devoted to gaining good for self alone. That being so constituted, God requires men to give him their affections and the service of their lives, and that they have the full power to comply with this requirement. That until they do obey this requisition, they are not subject to the law of God, and cannot be ; and while they are required by God to do what they do not wish to do, his character and law and service are objects of aversion rather than of pleasure, because they cross their wishes and desires. They hold that when men become truly pious, it is through the influence of the motives presented in the gospel, urged on the mind by the agency of man, and the co-operating influence of the Holy Spirit, and that without this supernatural influence, the unwillingness of man, to do his first duty would never be overcome.

In addition to this theory of mental constitution, may be added the different modes of interpreting scripture language. One class maintains that the words *can* and *cannot*, *able* and *unable*, and similar terms, are used in two senses by mankind ; one signifying entire inability of every kind, and the other signifying *unwillingness*. That the Bible uses the language of common life, and when God commands men to do a thing in one place, and says they can do it, and then says they cannot do it in another place, that the rules of interpretation re

quire the sense which does not make a contradiction ; and therefore in some cases *cannot* and *unable* signifies simply *unwillingness*, just as they often do, in the common use of the terms among mankind.

On the other hand, it is maintained that in those passages which declare the inability of man to do what God requires, as the terms of eternal safety, there is but one meaning to be allowed, and that is *physical inability*, or an inability entire in every respect.

Now you will find all who believe in the necessity of true religion in the heart, to fit men for Heaven, of whatever denomination they are, come into one of *three* classes. They either take the first theory, which is in fact the theory of fatalism, or else the second which is the theory of free agency ; or else they have no theory at all about it, and say they do not know how it is ; but that God does require men to give him their hearts, and does say they are *unable* to do it without Divine aid, and that *somehow* these things are consistent, but how they do not explain.

Those who hold that men are unable in every sense to fit themselves for heaven, have different modes of evading the inconsistency urged, when men come to them to inquire “ what must *we* do to be saved ? ” But the general method has been to say, that though men cannot do the thing required by God, they can read, and pray, and attend the offices of religion, and in this way God will interpose and afford them the aid they need, in order to in power to obey his commands.

I suppose the main difficulty that has agitated the Presbyterian church, and, to a less extent, the Congregational, has arisen from the fact, that one or the other of these theories of mental constitution, has been incorporated more or less into all our systems of theology. I suppose one of these theories, when clearly exhibited, to be no other than the theory of fatalism, and the other is its counterpart, or the system of free agency.

Yet when I state this, I merely give it as my opinion, and not as what the advocates of that theory, which I suppose involves the theory of fatalism, would allow. For they describe a theory of mental constitution which does, in fact, so far as I can understand it, make the mind of man a machine, that at one time necessarily and inevitably, from its very constitution, acts sinfully, and then after some supernatural change, as necessarily and inevitably has holy exercises. Yet still they claim to hold to free agency and moral accountability, and attempt to show that it is not inconsistent with their theory of mental constitution. But it is just the same, to my mind, as if they should describe a *square* as that which has four sides, and four right angles, and still maintain that they believe this is at the same time a *circle*. Their description of their theory of mental constitution, imparts ideas as inconsistent with my idea of free agency, as is the idea of a square inconsistent with my idea of a circle; and all their explanations only seem to envelope the subject in darkness.

I do not suppose it possible, *in the nature of*

*things*, to have but two theories on the subject of mental constitution ; one is, that the mind is an independent agent and that motives or objects of choice, are only necessary occasions for the exercise of its powers, and that the mind has the same power to choose what is not chosen, as to choose as it does. The other is, that motives or objects of choice are causes that operate necessarily on the mind, as attraction draws a magnet, and that the mind has not the power to choose any other way than as it does choose. I have never yet seen any theory of mental constitution that was not, when clearly understood, one or the other of these two theories, nor do I suppose it within the power of man to state any third theory, that is not, in fact, one or the other of these.

But whether I am right in my opinion of this matter or not, the fact cannot be denied, that this is the ground of difficulty in the Presbyterian church. Those who fully teach what I call the system of free agency, hold that depravity consists in *the want of the principle of piety*, or supreme love to God, and that *regeneration* consists in a *voluntary* change of the ruling purpose, or controlling principle of the mind, effected by the motives of the Gospel urged upon the attention, and the co-operating agency of the Holy Spirit. Those who hold the other theory, believe that depravity consists in the mental constitution, and that regeneration is a change in this constitution, wrought by the Spirit of God.

But there are few theologians who have *clearly*

expressed their views on these disputed points of mental constitution, until within a few years ; and now, the majority of our clergymen and laymen do not decidedly avow either, because they do not clearly understand the distinction, or because they think it is not best to contend about it. But the questions of old divinity and new divinity, old school and new school, New Haven divinity and its opposite divinity, all turn on just this point. And it is a matter that does not alone interest the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. Every minister of the Gospel, in every Evangelical sect, who believes that piety is indispensable to salvation, has got to meet these questions from his flock. "What is that act of the mind on which my salvation depends? Have I power to perform it or have I not? If I have the power, tell me exactly what it is, that is to be done, and how to do it. If I have not the power, explain to me how it is consistent with justice or benevolence, for my Maker to require of me what I have no power to perform, and threaten to punish me with eternal death, if I do not obey."

If then the Presbyterian and the Congregational churches divide, on the points that now agitate them, it will be on a question of *mental philosophy* as connected with the doctrines of religion. There are now three parties. One, that clearly and plainly teaches the system of free agency, in all its connection with religious truth and duty. Another consists of those who fully and fairly advocate the theory of mental constitution, which I suppose

to be the system of fatalism ; and the third, which is the larger portion, consists of those who have not clearly and definitely formed their opinions on the subject, and of those who do not wish to take sides.

In addition to this difficulty, there has some embarrassment arisen from the union of Congregationalists with Presbyterians. The Congregationalist believes that though his form of church government is the best, and the nearest to that of the primitive churches, yet that no particular form of church government is appointed as binding on the conscience by Divine authority, but rather that it is left as a matter of expediency. Of course the Congregationalist can conscientiously give up his form, and join the Presbyterian church. But Presbyterians of the *stricter* sort believe, that their form of church government is of divine appointment, and they therefore cannot conscientiously relinquish it. The Presbyterian church now embraces so many who have been Congregationalists, that there is some apprehension that they wish and are aiming to modify Presbyterianism, and will in the end change it to Congregationalism, by substituting Congregational Church Committees, instead of the permanent Presbyterian Ruling Elders, and introducing these Committee men into the church judicatures, to hold the place of ruling elders.

This, so far as I understand it, exhibits the causes of the present difficulties that agitate the Presbyterian church.

I wish now to reply to some remarks you made



to me about trying ministers like criminals, and punishing them because they do not believe as the majority think they ought. I suppose that there is some occasion for the impression that seemed to rest on your mind, when you made these remarks, for by adopting the forms and language of civil courts, our ecclesiastical judicatures make a somewhat unfavorable impression on the minds of those, who do not fully understand their character and objects.

The Presbyterian church is formed on the same principle as all social communities, civil or domestic. It is an association bound together by certain terms of agreement. Take, for example, our national government; each State unites in the national compact on certain terms of mutual agreement, and there is a Supreme Court to decide when these terms are violated, and how they must be fulfilled. In all religious denominations there is a tacit, if not a formal agreement of this kind. If an Episcopal clergyman should cease to read the prayers, and should omit the dress and forms of the church, and teach and preach that the Presbyterian form of church government and worship, is the proper one, he would be excluded from his denomination, and be told to go among those who thought as he did, and not stay to disturb the peace of the Episcopal church by propagating his views. And thus in all other denominations. If a man violates the express, or the tacit agreement he makes, when connecting himself with a church, he is dismissed from the association. It is thus the

Quakers do. It is thus even Unitarians would do, if one of their clergy should begin to teach that Mahomet is superior to Christ, and the Koran superior to the Bible.

Now the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, is the articles of agreement that unite the body ; and the judicatures of the church are the constituted authorities which, as in the case of the Supreme Court of the United States, decide what is a violation of this compact, and how it is to be understood.

In any case of difficulty the rules of the church require the following course :

First, the aggrieved member is to go to the party who is supposed to have violated the articles of agreement, and state his apprehensions, and ask an explanation. If he is still dissatisfied, he is to bring the matter before the elders of the church ; in the case of a clergyman it is to be brought before Presbytery. If the decision of Presbytery does not satisfy, as it often happens that personal partialities may be supposed to interfere, the case is appealed to Synod. If the decision of Synod does not satisfy, it is brought before the *whole church* as represented in General Assembly, and there a majority decides what is, and what is not, a violation of their articles of agreement. Here the party that appeals must stop, and either submit quietly, or else leave the Presbyterian church.

The difficulties in the Presbyterian church are now in a course of adjudication, and the question is, are the sentiments held by new-school men, so con-

trary to the articles of agreement, that they must cease to preach them, or else leave the Presbyterian church? If a majority of the General Assembly decides that they are so, then it is the duty of all who hold these sentiments, either to cease preaching them, or else to go out from the Presbyterian church and form another denomination. If it is decided by a majority, that these views may be taught, without violating the articles of agreement, then those who have made complaint, are bound to hold their peace, and treat those who hold these sentiments as brethren in the same faith. If they cannot conscientiously do this, it is their duty to withdraw from the Presbyterian church, and form another denomination.

I do not see any just ground for the two parties to feel enmity or ill will ; if they only can exercise the charity and patience and meekness of the gospel they profess, all can be terminated amicably and quietly. They only need to allow that their brethren *honestly* differ in opinion, and to feel willing that each party should act according to their views of right ; and if they find their principles so opposite that they cannot dwell in one family, to separate kindly, as did Lot and Abraham, and dwell in two different enclosures. I see no ground for one party to charge the other with stealing into the church to corrupt and alter its faith, nor for those who are tried for heresy, to complain of persecution, when according to the articles of agreement, they are brought before the proper tribunal

to show that they have not in any respect violated them. There may be cause of complaint, in regard to the spirit and manner in which the thing is done, and here I fear is ground for all who love the Presbyterian church and dwell in her enclosures, to feel humbled and grieved.

Yet still in expressing our opinions about the feelings and conduct of our religious teachers, it seems to me we cannot be too cautious or too charitable. I have great respect for the piety, the talents and the sincerity of many on *both* sides ; and I do verily believe, that however much of party spirit and evil feelings there may have been generated in this painful collision (for ministers are men, and subject to like passions as other men,) it has been real apprehension in regard to the cause of God and the salvation of souls, that has chiefly sustained the excitement and alarm. I believe that if all fears of this kind could be quieted, the whole difficulty would end.

Our clergymen have the care of souls committed to them ; they believe that the salvation of their people depends upon their faithfulness in exhibiting truth, and in keeping out error. Of course, they feel more deeply, than other men, the importance of the peculiar views of religious truth, which they deem correct. And as no man can read the heart, it seems to me to be taking the office of the Omniscient Judge, to pronounce on the motives and feelings less pure, that may mingle with those which they profess. Every good and virtuous man has an interest in sustaining the character and

influence of our clergy of all denominations ;—for as a body they are among the main bulwarks of virtue and religion, and every thing that lessens their influence and respect among their fellow citizens, is an injury to the cause of virtue and religion, of which they are the appointed guardians.

For this reason it is, that I lament the practice now so common, of speaking, of all religious discussions, as *quarrels*. Is there not a distinction between free and animated discussion and quarrelling? If men can keep their temper, and treat their antagonists with courtesy, fairness, and benevolence, they may earnestly contend for principles and doctrines, and yet be free from the charge of being engaged in a quarrel.

One other thing is to be lamented. Ministers feel more deeply on the subject of religious truth than on any other ; at the same time their position as *teachers to others* gives them the least advantage of learning to bear contradiction and collision with patience, and candor, and equanimity. In their ecclesiastical meetings they come together as *equals*, to discuss subjects in which, of all others, their warmest feelings, their ministerial character and influence, and every thing they most value are interested. In such bodies, there are always some men, quick in feeling and hasty in speech, and it would be passing strange, were there not often things said, that were better left unsaid. And yet every body holds ministers up to much stricter rules of judging than other men. Men think, and they think truly, that ministers ought to be models of

christian candor, charity, courtesy and truth. And yet, in such circumstances, where ministers are most exposed to temptation, and most severely watched and criticised, all their hasty words and excited debates are drawn out, and put in the newspapers, and sent all over the land ; while their subsequent repentance, their mutual concessions and acknowledgments in private, and all the palliating circumstances can never be known.

Now I acknowledge that ministers ought to be perfect, even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect ; and yet when they fail, I think those who judge them, ought to take into consideration the palliating circumstances.

I cannot but hope that the Presbyterian church will not be divided on such a question as now agitates it,—for I do not believe it is yet properly understood by its members. Although it is in reality, a subject that *can* be made simple and intelligible to common minds, it is now so thoroughly involved in metaphysical subtleties and theological technics, that the laymen generally do not and will not understand it ; and this is one reason why so many intelligent and pious among them, feel so little interest in the matter, and so much regret that it occupies the time and thoughts of their clergymen to such an extent. I wish any clergyman that thinks the Presbyterian church *can* be *intelligently* divided on this matter, would call together his elders, and read to them two or three chapters in Edwards on the Freedom of the Will, and some of Coleridges writings on Necessity and

Free Will, and then ask their advice about dividing the Presbyterian church on the points therein discussed. I think he would hear some practical, common-sense remarks, to which it would be wise to give heed.

It seems to me this is a day, when, instead of dividing into more sects, it is demanded that the bands of christian harmony should draw together, with warmer charity, all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and preach and love the truths of his Gospel. To secure this, Christians must learn to "agree to differ peaceably;" and to leave every Christian brother, unmolested with complaints or rebukes, when he acts according to his own principles, instead of conforming to the principles of others.

The Evangelical sects of this country are now all engaged in spreading the gospel through the earth. *Let* the Episcopalian believe that his is the only real ordination; and the Baptist that his is the only proper mode of admission to the church; and the Methodist and the Presbyterian that theirs is the best form of church government and worship. These opinions do not interfere with the rites and interests of other sects, and while their advocates do not give them the place in their attention and efforts that is disproportionate, and act with the fairness, sincerity, meekness and gentleness of Christ, there is no injury done by each one trying to propagate his own peculiar views. It is a right and a duty.

It seems to me each sect occupies an important

sphere, and each accomplishes something that the other could not do. The Episcopal forms and mode of government are fitted to one class of minds, better probably than any other; and who that witnesses the piety of the clergy of that church, the increasing numbers and spirituality of her members, and the various religious enterprizes that she sustains, if the spirit of Christ is in his heart, but can fervently say, "Peace to thy walls and prosperity to thy palaces." And what Christian that witnesses the action and efficacy of the Methodist Church, the piety, self-denial, and faithfulness of her clergy, the thousands of wastes, that under her care are beginning to blossom as the rose, can refuse her a hearty God-speed in her labors of love. And our Baptist brethren, the pioneers in the modern work of missions and translations, who are now with us in every thing but a single rite, why should we not give them the right hand of fellowship, and rejoice in their prosperity as well as our own.

May that happy day soon come, when Christians can differ in opinion, and yet dwell side by side, in peace, and harmony, and love.

Yours, &c.











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